DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Traditional storytelling in a digital world
the transformative power of storytelling across media

Maxwell, Deborah

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Deborah Maxwell

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University of Dundee

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Traditional Storytelling in a Digital World:

the transformative power of Storytelling across media

Deborah Maxwell
Doctor of Philosophy

Duncan of Jordanstone
College of Art & Design
University of Dundee
March 2010

Story strands weaving

thick digital tapestry –

Wind: perspective shifts.[1]

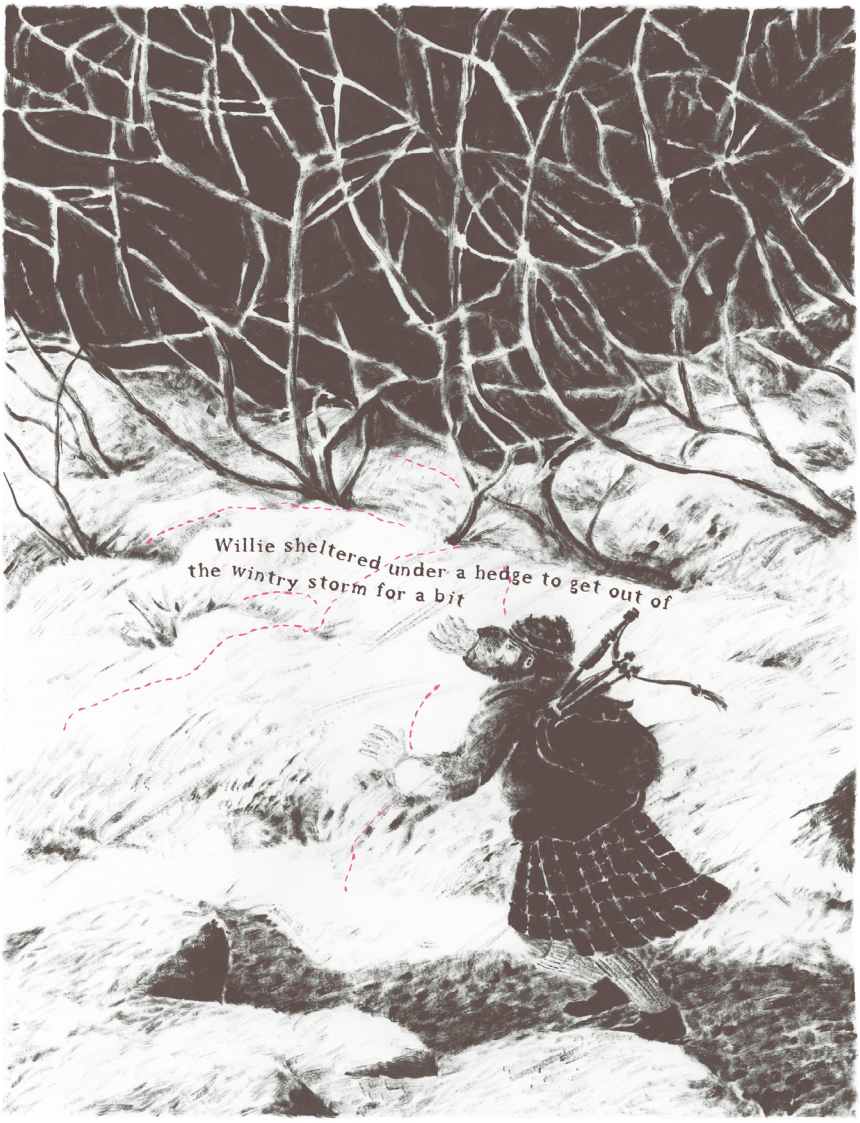
1. My dissertation haiku, February 4, 2010. http://dissertationhaiku.wordpress.com/2010/02/04/communications (Accessed 17 February 2010.)

Abstract

I see stories. At the bus stop, in the pub, even on Twitter. It's how we communicate. This thesis is no different. It tells lots of stories, how you hear them depends on the reader as much as the writer. One of the stories in this book is of my own personal journey from a lowly PhD student to a fully fledged member of the storytelling community in Scotland. The personal narrative is woven throughout the text as a series of reflections and diary extracts. Another story is the development of Blether Tay-gither, the local Dundee-based storytelling group which was set up during the course of my research and continues to grow in leaps and bounds. Blether Tay-gither gave me my ticket into the storytelling world, validating my credentials.

The main tale however, is that of storytelling in contemporary, technological society. What does it mean to be a storyteller? Why would someone become a storyteller? And what possible relevance could it have to today's society? These questions are answered largely by the tellers themselves through a series of interview snapshots and discussions.

What is not addressed by them, though, is the relationship between storytelling and digital technology, or new media. Whilst storytellers are not inherently anti-technology, they are not in general, avid consumers of digital media. Yet by comparing a set of characteristics for storytelling and new media (generated through extensive participant observation), and developing a lens for reflection, the connections between them can be probed. These connections are proof in and of themselves of the continued relevance and need for engaging stories and strongly suggest that creative technology-enabled storytelling experiences would be well received. A set of such creative hybridised storytelling environments was developed by introducing young designers to traditional stories and storytelling techniques, allowing them to generate a range of innovative prototypes. This case study is examined in some detail and the reflection tool used to consider the success of each conceptual idea.


Willie sheltered under a hedge to get out of
the wintry storm for a bit

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List of Illustrations

Illustrations by Stefanie Hess

Associated Publications

Maxwell D., Macaulay C. & Inns T. (2008) Inspired Storytelling: the Digital Re-tellings of a Traditional Tale Narrative in Interactive Learning Environments (NILE) conference, 5-8 August, 2008, Edinburgh.

Maxwell D. & Macaulay C. (2006) Oral Culture: a useful concept relevant to information seeking in context? Proceedings of the InSciT2006 Conference, International Conference on Multidisciplinary Information Sciences and Technologies, October, 25-28th, 2006, Merida, Spain

Declaration by the Candidate

I declare that I am the author of this thesis; that, unless otherwise stated in the text, all references cited have been consulted by me; that, except for those parts of work which are declared in this thesis to be based upon joint research, the work which this thesis records is mine; and that it has not been previously presented or accepted for a higher degree.

Deborah Maxwell
March 2010

Declaration by the Supervisor

I declare that Deborah Maxwell has satisfied all the terms and conditions of the regulations made under Ordinances 12 and 39; and has completed the required 9 terms of research to qualify in submitting this thesis in application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr Catriona Macaulay
March 2010

Acknowledgements

It is my name on the front page and whilst this physical document represents a personal journey this work could not have been possible without a whole raft of people. I have been privileged enough to not only observe or simply participate in but to become part of the Scottish storytelling community. The welcoming, generous nature of all the tellers I have worked with have made this thesis the way it is. I am forever grateful to them.

The storytellers of Blether Tay-gither have suffered the most with my research and writing process yet they have always proved willing to discuss my ideas and read over drafts. Special thanks goes to Robbie, Lindsey, Sheila, Senga (thanks for the super fast proofread turn around!), Owen and Sylvia. Many other storytellers have been of invaluable help to me, as always, but especially Anna, Claire, Michael, Ruth, Frances, Russell, Judy, Jackie, Rachel, Donald and lastly but certainly not least, Jess. I would like to extend a special thank you to Bisi Adigun, although we only met once, he told me the first story I'd heard since childhood and directly inspired my research.

My other key research participants or co-creators who desperately need a mention here are the Interactive Media Design students who so admirably and successfully tackled the challenge of retelling a traditional tale using digital media, allowing me to observe and record their projects.

The wonderful illustrations peppered throughout this thesis tell the story the students retold digitally, Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots. Stefanie Hess is responsible for the design of the cover and the illustrations, going above and beyond the call of duty, even providing me with my very own font! Thank you so much, Stefanie.

My supervisors, Dr Catriona Macaulay and Professor Tom Inns,

have kept a patient faith with me, and they have my undying admiration and thanks for keeping me going through this process. Thank you for your guidance.

Thank you to all my friends and colleagues who have given me support and advice, you know who you are! Also, to fellow Twitterers, who have answered my innumerable pleas for help (including inspiring music suggestions) and been inundated with my frustrated #phdhell tweets, thank you, especially to Graeme, Jonathan, Ceara, Jeffrey, David, Lorna and Steve. And thanks Gel for the Spotify playlist, it got me through the final stretch.

Finally, love and thanks must go to my parents, Margie and David, who I forced to hear first drafts, second drafts and umpteenth drafts, and who have also been my storytelling guinea pigs when I practised. Thank you both for not only supporting me on the good days but encouraging me to keep going on the dark days. To Amber, my mad, mad Springer spaniel, I will now take you out on lots of exciting new walks, I promise!


Willie sensed he wasn't alone!

To Blether Tay-gither,
without whom this thesis
would never have been possible

Part I:
Setting
the
Scene


'He'll have no use for the boots now. And
mine are worn through' Willie thought

Prologue: Going into the Land where the Stories Grow

WHEN I started my PhD I hadn't heard of storytelling as a profession or pastime. Like many people, my experience and perceptions of storytelling were of childhood bedtime stories, largely read from books.

I was aware of 'oral culture' and 'storytelling' in far flung countries and tribes such as Papua New Guinea, but I never expected to find such a rich vein of the stuff in my own back yard. Four years later, having experienced many stories (both as listener and teller) I can now fully appreciate how lucky I am to be surrounded by so many stories and skilled tellers. Each teller has their own story, their own reasons for how they came to be the teller they are today and their own unique voice and style. I cannot pretend to do justice to their own intensely personal life stories, but I can share some of my own experiences as a budding and sometimes unwilling teller in both traditional and digital worlds.

My wide-eyed introduction to storytelling happened in a pub in Edinburgh, just round the corner from the Scottish Storytelling Centre on the high street. It was during the International Storytelling Festival in November 2006. After attending a festival workshop at the Centre on identity and sense of home entitled '*The Differences We Share*', most of the group (largely made up of experienced storytellers) retreated to the pub for food and socialising. And it was there that I discovered Story. For although the day's workshop had been centred around storytelling, there had been no actual storytelling.

It was an enlightening and fortuitous day for me. I arrived at the Netherbow almost by chance, planning to be in Edinburgh that weekend anyway

for a friend's birthday party. I caught an early train from Perth on the Saturday morning, having only discovered late the previous evening (through the Storytelling Centre's website) that there was a workshop running. I rang the Centre from the train in the hope that there would be a space left for me to attend the workshop. Unsure of what to expect and where to go, I arrived just in time and was shown up to the George Mackay Brown library. Within half an hour, I was sitting in the kitchen down the corridor, trying to learn an African song with four storytellers prior to performing it to the rest of the groups. One of the tellers was Jess Smith. I confess I was a little star-struck, by some twist of fate I had just finished reading her first book the week before. And now here I was, singing with her! Looking back now, that day seems incredibly serendipitous. I have never since been to a workshop with so many well-known storytellers at it, or with so much discussion on the nature of storytelling. They were a very friendly bunch too, making sure that I was spoken to at all the coffee breaks, asking with genuine interest what my connection to storytelling was. (My interest at the time was in oral culture in general. I had been hoping to work with Somali immigrants in Glasgow but fortune had not favoured me in this regard and so I was having to rethink my research focus.) My remaining impression of the day is the memory of laughter and sense of friendship which seemed to permeate the room.

And as I mentioned, after the workshop everyone congregated to the pub and somehow I tagged along too. The pub was virtually next door to the Centre, right on the corner of the High Street and Jeffrey Street. It was relatively quiet before we all arrived, about twenty of us, and we pretty much filled the whole of the bar area of the narrow, traditional styled pub. Everyone peeled off into their groups and so at my table were two storytellers not part of the larger storytelling clique—a woman from England with thick-lensed glasses and the man who had led the singing group I had been at in the morning session, Nigerian-born but living in Ireland. He repeated referred to himself as a 'Black Paddy'.

Fortified by beer, I asked them both to tell me a story. I complained. I had been at a storytelling workshop all day and hadn't even heard a single story. And so it was that I heard of Jackal and Leopard. I was blown away. I saw Jackal and Leopard, fighting over a calf, I saw the teller, but the two scenes merged. I was held captivated. I was returned to my five year old self.

Following that day, it was not until March 2007 that the Dundee group Blether Tay-gither was founded. This was borne out of a workshop run the month prior, 'Looking for Peace' which was run by a Fife teller. It was held in the University Chaplaincy in Dundee and there was a good attendance (over twenty people). Most people were novice tellers like myself, interested in the concept and applications of storytelling. The workshop leader was supported by a teller from Edinburgh, Russell (currently chair of the Scottish Storytelling Forum) and it was thanks to Russell that the group set up. At the end of the workshop he suggested that a Dundee-based group might work and I, along with two others, agreed to try and set one up.

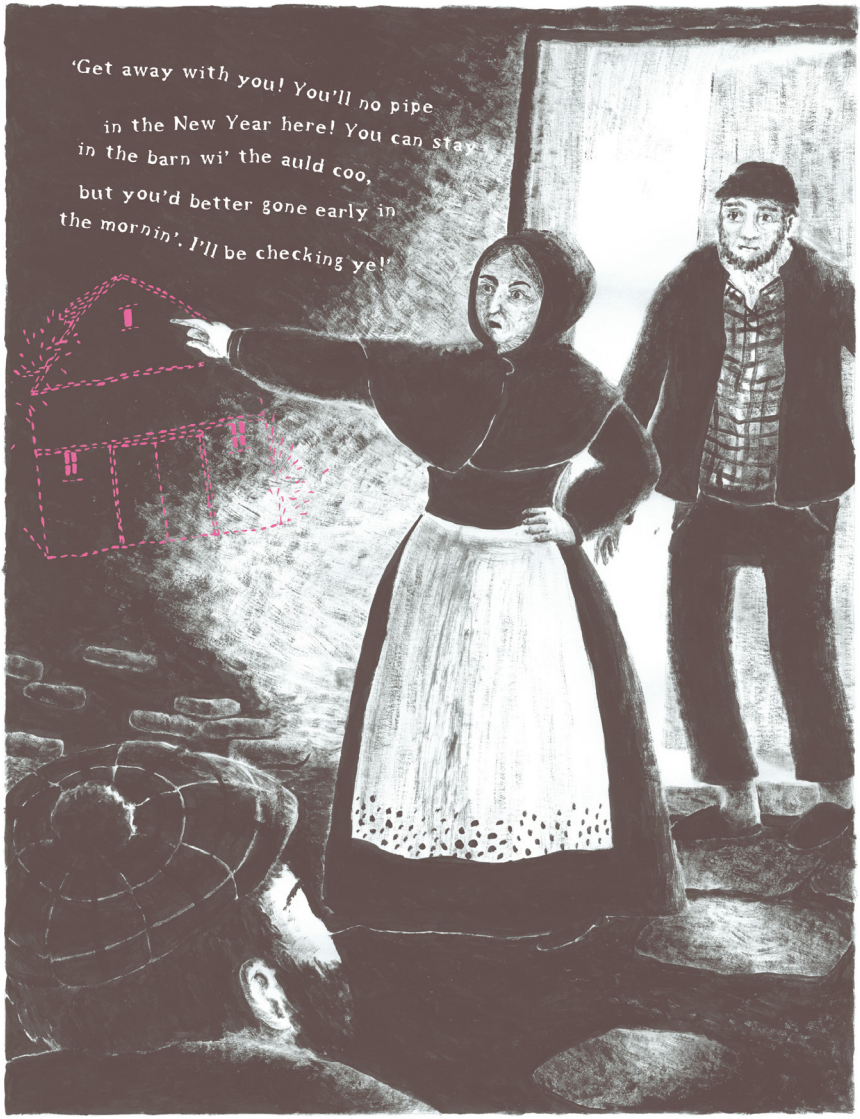
In March, we had our first meeting in the School of Computing building (again at the University). Amazingly, eighteen people turned up, a fact I now largely attribute to Russell spreading the word throughout the storytelling community. Since then, we have gone from strength to strength. Numbers for each event vary from about twelve to twenty, but we have a core group of about ten tellers who come along each month. Our name, Blether Tay-gither, came a few months later and is now firmly a part of us.

At the start, I was deeply conscious of my role as 'researcher', wanting to adopt participant observation techniques, more than willing to give something to the group to gain admittance and acceptance, so long as I didn't have to tell a story. I was wary of telling a story, much more comfortable in the guise of listener, seeing myself as an organiser and facilitator. And that is what I did. I organised, printed up flyers, built a website, emailed people, phoned people and found venues to host our meetings. And so on. More than two years on, I still view my role in much the same light, though the organisation and responsibility of the group is much more shared. I tell stories more of-ten now, trusting myself not to forget the plot and knowing that even if I do, as long as I carry on with some form of the tale, all is not lost. However, the key difference now is that if I haven't told a story by the end of our monthly sessions then I feel a bit let down. Disappointed. I don't consider myself to be a good, or even competent storyteller but I have actually begun to enjoy telling stories. Sometimes everything just works. The story is clear in front of you, the listeners are attentive and with you, and it seems as if nothing could be more right. Invariably for me, as a novice teller, these feelings last for only part of the telling, but the belief

that it's possible to tell an entire story with such a connection drives me to keep trying.

My life as a member of the storytelling community (I won't say 'as a storyteller') has given me much more meaningful access into the storytelling world than if I had simply contacted the community as a researcher. Although technically my data-gathering phase is over, I am still part of the community, forging links between storytelling clubs, trying to establish the group more firmly into the local environment. In some ways the methods of my research are very novel. The local Dundee group did not exist before my research and I truly believe would not have begun without me. This 'grow a group' approach to research only worked for me because of the support from the wider storytelling community in Scotland and I am grateful to it.

My research has challenged the way I perceive the world and not only in the way that I now see and hear stories everywhere. My parents think I am half mad, retreated to a childlike state, entranced by puppets and folktales. But I blame them. It was my parents who introduced me to the world of books and stories. My dad who made the teddies dance up and down the bedroom door frame before I went to sleep. Perhaps the problem is that I have never grown up, but I have realised that stories are not just for children. Stories are for everyone.


'Get away with you! You'll no pipe
in the New Year here! You can stay
in the barn wi' the auld coo,
but you'd better gone early in
the mornin'. I'll be checking ye!"

Chapter 1
Introduction

STORIES are everywhere. We tell our lives as stories (Bruner, 2002), and becoming involved in the Scottish storytelling community has opened my eyes to this usually sub-conscious awareness. Storytelling (the live sharing of stories, 'eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart') is largely considered by the general public to be purely for children, designated an old-fashioned quirk—part of school days—an activity which, along with face painting, is reserved for family fun days at local tourist attractions.

By comparison, new media is 'cool', or 'smart'. Video or photographs snapped on mobile phones are directly uploaded to Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, sharing events and updates almost instantaneously. This thesis posits that these two seemingly polar worlds are not as disconnected as we might imagine. Storytelling is still a core human activity and live telling, as described in these pages, has direct relevance to today's society. Attempts to incorporate storytelling, or narrative, into technology have so far been primarily based on literate culture, and have therefore taken little account of the characteristic attributes of storytelling, such as malleability, liveness and the connection between story, teller and listener. This thesis provides a way to reflect upon new media narrative objects.

1.1 Research Aims

> Despite traditional storytelling culture's resistance to adopt technology, and technology's inability to embrace traditional storytelling, similarities between attributes of storytelling and properties of new media guarantees traditional storytelling's future relevance to both traditional and digital spheres.

The above statement presents the positioning argument for this thesis. But in order to either prove or disprove this hypothesis, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the relationship between storytelling and new media?
2. How can connections between storytelling and new media be utilised to meaningfully explore their similarities and relationship to each other?
    - 2.1. What are the points of intersection/connections between storytelling and technology?
    - 2.2. How can storytelling qualities be transposed into the digital realm?
    - 2.3. How can these qualities and connections be explored?

The answer to question one is found predominantly in Part II, *The Stories*, which is a detailed examination of the storytelling community in Scotland. The other side of the relationship between new media and narrative is considered in the Bridge section, *Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling*. This looks at the ways in which new media and technology have attempted to connect with narrative, or 'storytelling'.

The second research question requires a set of sub-questions to answer it. Question 2.1 is tackled in the Bridge section, *Connections between New Media & Storytelling* and *Developing a Lens for Reflection* where the links between the two areas are discussed.

The final two sub questions are examined in Part III *Creating & Exploring Connections*, using a case study of Interactive Media Design students who worked on a module, *The ReTelling*, which was developed to explore the possibility of closer connections between storytelling and new media. Students were introduced to the world of story-telling and asked to re-interpret a traditional tale (*Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots*, as illustrated throughout the thesis) using digital means. The students quickly identified key elements of storytelling and some of these became the focus of projects (for example *gesture* and the *physical presence of the storyteller*). The case study clearly showed that not only are there similarities between new media and storytelling, but that qualities conventionally thought solely the

province of storytelling could coexist with and be integrated into digital technology.

1.2 Scope of Thesis

This thesis attempts to break new ground in several ways. One way is through the novel interdisciplinary domain of traditional storytelling and new media. Despite first appearances, digital storytelling and virtual or interactive storytelling bear little correlation to the research approach presented here. Therefore, the scope of this research does not fall into the digital narrative field. Nor it is a thesis based in the field of social media (e.g. Krotoski, 2009), though there are naturally elements of this. Rather, this research presents a theory of storytelling as a form of oral culture existing in a literate and technological society, yet one which still has relevance and significance to this technological society. Needless to say then, this research is exploratory, raising questions as much as answering them. It is important to note that the outcomes of the thesis are not to *prescribe* ways of embedding storytelling in digital culture, but simply to suggest areas for reflection through a visual tool. Similarly, it was not the intention to build a digital storytelling environment, the examples used in Part III were developed by a set of university students as a third year module and not by myself, though I was obviously involved in the teaching and guidance process.

Finally, it is necessary to briefly consider *performance*. *Performance* as a term is over-laid with a myriad of meaning and uses, including in the domains of business, arts and sports. In fact, Carlson reminds us that 'performance is "an essentially contested concept."' (Carlson, 2004, p. 1) This thesis is not concerned with tackling themes of performance and performance studies, but it is important to clarify the use of the term. Therefore, Goffman's definition below has been adopted for the purpose of this thesis:

> A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contrib

> ute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants.
>
> (Goffman, 1959, p.15-16 cited in Schechner, 2002, p. 23)

The research presented in these pages is grounded very much by the local storytelling community under study. As Wilson (2006, p. 59) notes, within the UK, "platform storytelling" as a term is often known as "performance storytelling", and this is certainly the case with the group of storytellers involved in this research. *Performance* has strong connotations of placing the teller firmly in the spotlight, with a primary importance, and demonstrating a marked distinction between the listeners and the teller, thereby forming a barrier to group story-sharing and relating to Ryan's "mega-identity".

> We put too much effort into the storyteller performance and not enough in the storytelling performance. Tremendous energy goes into creating the persona of professional storyteller, often attendant with eccentricities setting it off from normal individuals and other artists. It becomes what I refer to as a mega-identity, a lifestyle choice that is meant to be a shorthand to tell people "this person is a storyteller" but that also can support or inflate ego.
>
> (Ryan, 2008)

Likewise, in response to an email, one of the storytellers claimed that, 'True telling is not a performance' (see Chapter 9). In deference to these connotations, wherever possible I have avoided use of the term 'performance', using 'telling' or 'live event' in its place.

Having briefly mentioned what this thesis is not, it is pertinent to note the contributions to knowledge it does make. Part II, *The Stories*, makes considerable use of a local storytelling group, Blether Tay-gither. This group formed the focus of the ethnographic study in the thesis, however the method employed here was novel. The group did not exist prior to the study and was in fact instigated by the researcher, i.e. me. The ethnographic observations took place during the formation and development of the group over three years, whilst I adopted a complete-member researcher role (Adler, 1990). Whilst the role itself was not unique, the creation of a functioning, 'real' study group was. The group is now stronger than ever

and will continue to exist even after this piece of research has finished.

The participant observations undertaken whilst in the study group, and in the wider storytelling community, allowed the development of a set of storytelling attributes which were validated by the community itself. These storytelling characteristics formed part of a spectrum along with a set of synthesised new media characteristics and their overlapping connections. This spectrum was the basis of a framework for re-flection for new media objects designed to assess their storytelling and new media qualities.

1.3 Audiences

It is anticipated that this thesis will be of interest to two main audiences. Firstly, new media designers and developers who are looking to incorporate narrative or storytelling elements to create immersive user experiences. Secondly, it is hoped that the storytelling community will find the results presented here of interest and of help when self-reflecting on their storytelling practices and the possibility of technology.

Aside from those two main audiences, other groups with specific needs may find this research useful. Oral historians, folklorists, tradition bearers and indigenous communities are increasingly turning to electronic means of preservation and dissemination. This thesis, and the framework for reflection in particular, may offer fruitful reflection on appropriate alternative ways of representing such oral tradition.

One of the underlying recurrent strands weaving through this text is the relation-ship between orality and literacy, or more accurately, the continuum stretching be-tween them. Whilst this research is based on the Scottish storytelling community, it would be interesting to apply and extend the *Lens for Reflection* tool to other contexts and literacy scenarios, and may therefore prove relevant to researchers in such fields.

1.4 Structure of Thesis

The form of this thesis breaks from scientific academic convention in several ways. Perhaps most obviously, the author, or researcher, is conspicuously present. Some sections of the document are more traditional, but they are interspersed with personal narrative and descriptive dialogues

from interviews and discussion sessions. This is completely deliberate, it is the intent of this thesis to represent storytelling culture in the most honest and respectful way possible, and using a 'messy text' (Denzin, 1997) was deemed the most appropriate approach (see chapter 3). The mix of writing was developed as a means to navigate the story strands contained throughout the text.

Unless otherwise stated, all quotes and conversations with storytellers are verbatim, taken directly from video recordings of interviews (see appendix B for sample interview transcripts) and validated by the individuals concerned before inclusion in this thesis. The video footage served as a reference for the descriptive interview sections, providing contextual information about location and physical mannerisms. Similarly, quotes from student interviews and blogs in Part III are all verbatim. Journal extracts draw on real events, recreated with the help of field notes (see chapter 3.2) and express reflections and a personal viewpoint on my experiences of storytelling. In three in-stances, the events described in the thesis are partly reconstructed from memory: *A Journey into the Land of Stories* in chapter 4, *The Story Triad* in chapter 7, and *Alternative Realities: A Storyscape* in the Bridge section. In each case, authenticity and validity of the account was checked by asking members present to provide feedback (see chapter 3). To facilitate signposting of these accounts, each instance is prefaced with a outline of its creation process.

The range of writing styles has necessarily impacted upon the physical design of the thesis. Whilst the visual page layout was designed to be unobtrusive and sympathetic, distinctions in writing genres are reflected visually. Although every attempt has been made to make this as aesthetically pleasing as possible through consultation with friendly graphic designers, I am by no means a book designer, and any flaws or inconsistencies are solely my responsibility.

Inspired by storytelling books such as the Andrew Lang series (*The Rose Fairy Book*, *The Blue Fairy Book* etc.) this thesis was originally conceived of as a volume set of short books. The aim was to create a tangible link between the traditional and the digital. Upon reflection however, the scope of this idea was reduced to a single volume, published using Lulu.com, a website which utilises new media technology, enabling the production of a single print run of a book to be published, ordered and marketed via the

Internet.

The thesis is themed into parts, each containing a subset of shorter chapters. Part I, Setting the Scene, provides an overview and background introduction to the core do-main of storytelling and technology, and includes discussion on the methodological approach adopted.

Part II presents the bulk of the empirical work, drawn from participant observation of the study group, Blether Tay-Gither, the Dundee storytelling group. It opens with *A Journey into the Land of Stories*, an account of a typical evening of storytelling. Chapter 4 (*What is Storytelling?*) focuses on the background of storytellers, and the applications in which storytelling is found in Scotland. Chapter 5, *The Relevance of Storytelling*, discusses the attitudes of tellers towards storytelling, examining their thoughts on what they deem the wider benefits of their practice to be. Chapter 6 *Transformational Storytelling* concerns itself with the 'power' of storytelling, what the draw is—why do we tell stories? Chapter 7, *The Dynamics of Live Telling*, looks at the fundamental connection between story, teller and listener, and also questions the importance and role of visual imagination. Chapter 8, *Ethos of Storytelling*, examines the archetypes of telling, formalised support structures for storytelling in Scotland, and contentious issues in contemporary storytelling. Chapter 9, *Attributes of Telling*, charts the development of a set of characteristics of storytelling, beginning from sources in literature and continuing through evidence found in participation observation along with refinement from the wider storytelling community. Chapter 10, *Technology and Telling*, considers the attitudes of tellers towards technology, and contains some personal reflections on this.

The Bridge section, *The Relationship between Storytelling & New Media*, provides a connection between the storytelling focused Part II and the following new media led Part III. In many ways this thesis and its structure reflects facets of my identity. I consider myself to be a bridge between the two worlds. My background is firmly in technology (as my undergraduate MEng degree in Computer Systems Engineering testifies), yet part of my heart and soul has been captured by storytelling (as this thesis testifies!). I stand at the end of the journey with a foot in both worlds, embracing both viewpoints, and the Bridge section duly includes personal reflections on social media and an account of storytelling in Second Life. An electronic 'storyscape' is described, and examples of digital storytelling efforts noted.

Key outcomes of this section however are a set of characteristics of new media and a discussion on the connections between storytelling and new media. Building on this, a framework (a *Lens for Reflection)* is developed.

Part III, *Creating & Exploring Connections*, describes a case study in which Interactive Media Design students were asked to respond to the creative catalyst of a traditional tale, reinterpreting it using digital technology. Chapter 11, *The ReTelling*, gives an overview of this case study, whilst chapter 12 considers the methodological approach and the main steps of the module. Chapter 13 reflects on the understanding the students developed of storytelling, noting their differences and similarities with the set of attributes derived in chapter 9. Chapter 14 presents the final project results from the case study, with direct reference to the framework developed in the Bridge section. Finally, chapter 15 analyses the case study and its results, and applies the *Lens for Reflection* to four new media applications.

Part IV concludes the thesis, chapter 16 summarising the contributions to knowledge, and chapter 17 reflecting on the overall research process before offering suggestions for future work.

Chapter 2
Storytelling as Oral Culture

The relationship and connections between contemporary storytelling practices and new media forms the focus for this thesis. However, it is important to first place this storytelling world in the wider field and literature. Storytelling in Scotland, that is, the live sharing of stories, typically folktales, to a group of listeners, is an oral tradition. This orality is firmly embedded in literacy, itself part of a rapidly evolving technological society. This chapter examines orality and literacy and the debates therein, before grounding them more specifically in contemporary storytelling practices.

As will become apparent, by regarding storytelling as an example of an oral culture it becomes firmly situated within anthropological debate on oral cultures and literate society. Although this may initially seem a simplification upon the nature of storytelling, the reality is that discussion on the more abstract subject of orality, and its inter-twined topic literacy, reveals the complexity inherent in both. This in turn reflects the layered nature of contemporary storytelling as an oral culture embedded in a literate *and* technological society.

Additionally, by including arguments surrounding literacy in our discussion, a background insight into the relationship between tradition and technology can be developed, as literacy is an example of technology.

2.1 The Amorphous Nature of Oral Cultures

The increase in globalisation, communication and mobile technologies and the resultant overlap between 'literate' and 'oral' has led to the lack of pure non-literate oral cultures, whilst all literate societies have degrees of orality (for example within the highly literate academia, conference presenta-

tions, vivas and networking are all oral). Therefore the term 'oral culture' does not necessarily preclude knowledge of literacy, but primarily manifests itself though the prevalence of oral performances (e.g. recitals, oratory, ritual and poetry).

Written texts have an air of permanence—of disembodied voices transcending space, time and death. Oral communication is more immediate and essentially alive; '*sound exists only when it is going out of existence*' (Ong, 1986, p. 25).

In pre-literate cultures the amount of information that can be stored by an individual is finite (Ong, 1986). Thus 'collective memory' is codified in narrative using rich, descriptive language and stored by the group memory as a whole. The generational handing down of knowledge helps to maintain the hierarchical structure of society as elders act as a knowledge repository, reinforcing their status and the respect due to them (Goody, 1987).

> In an oral society, one can neglect the words of the elders only to one's detriment, not simply because of a general idea of respect but also because those words constitute the major source of information.
>
> (Goody, 1987, p. 150)

Amidst all the debate amongst scholars, a universally accepted attribute of oral cultures is *malleability*; collective knowledge is not necessarily passed on unchanged ad infinitum. Goody and Watt (1968) describe how genealogies vary as even collective memory has limits. Genealogies naturally grow over time, yet the additional numbers of births are countered by dropping out the oldest ancestors. Similarly, they recount how the Gonja of Northern Ghana explain the subdivision of their state into seven by relating it to their founder's (Ndewura Jakpa) seven sons. Due to British colonisation two of these divisions vanished and the number of Ndewura Jakpa's sons correspondingly reduces to five. Thus narrative's inherent flexibility can reflect historical and political changes.

In a similar vein, it has been noted that verbatim recitation does not necessarily warrant the same attention in oral traditions as in literate. Meaning, or sense, is the criterion against which expressions are judged, i.e. two expressions meaning the same are deemed to actually be the same without using the exact wording (Olson, 1996). In the 1930's, Parry and Lord's

study in Yugoslavia (Lord et al., 2000) showed that epic poetry was composed orally during recitals aided by formulaic phrasings. These epithets were repeated throughout the recital and were designed to fit into the metric structure of the poem, providing momentary thinking time for the performer to prepare the next few lines (Finnegan, 1977). That is to say, the narrative of the epic was remembered in essence but not repeated exactly the same; allowing interpretation and creativity to creep into what was previously considered a word-for-word recital.

However, many oral performances *are* rehearsed rigorously before recital: for example Somali poetry (Ahmed, 1996) is alliterative, has a rigid meter and is memorised. Known as the nation of bards, Somalia has a rich history of poetry and the importance of the poet and their words is significant:

> Poetry plays many roles and fulfils many functions for all groups in Somalia. For a long time, the poet was believed to possess a special knowledge that exonerated him/her from mundane limits. The poet could get away with things that, had he delivered them in prose form, would have put him into trouble.
>
> (Ahmed, 1996, p. 10)

> Camels are looted and men killed because of poetry. The more camels a clan owns, the greater their resources. Camels bring men together. If a clan loots camels and kills men from another clan, the injured clan may bide their time and not rise in immediate revenge. But if the victorious clan attempt, as they often do, to immortalise their victory in verse, then the looted clan feels humiliated and immediately seeks to revenge their honour and avenge their wrongs. Thus revenge follows revenge, and feud, feud. (Quoting Samatar, 1982)
>
> (Lewis, 1999, p. 73)

Other examples of orality are highly ritualised, for example oratory, where the content of speech is less important than its traditional formalised structure and where the physical presentation is tightly defined including restricted gestures, tone of voice and body position (Bloch, 1975, Salmond, 1975, Postill, 2003). These ritualised genres uphold social structure as substantial time and learning is required to obtain the skills to perform. In the

case of the Merina of Madagascar, age is a defining factor in respectability regarding oratory, as maturity or '*dry bones*' is deemed to be closer to the ancestors and thus wisdom (Bloch, 1975).

Keith Basso describes the connection between people, stories and their landscape in his book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996). Based on his anthropological research with the Western Apache, he focuses on simple stories situated in local locations. Here however, a key factor in the tale telling is on the purpose or intent of the stories. Stories are like arrows, shot by elders at unruly or disruptive younger members. If the story hits its mark, the effects are felt by the recipient for years to come, and are strengthened by the link to place—each time they pass the story setting they are reminded of their past transgressions. Basso recounts an elder's reflection:

> They [stories] go to work on your mind and make you think about your life. Maybe you've not been acting right. Maybe you've been stingy. Maybe you've been chasing after women…People don't like it! So someone goes hunting for you—maybe your grandmother, your grandfather, your uncle. It doesn't matter. Anyone can do it.
>
> So someone stalks you and tells a story about what happened long ago. It doesn't matter if other people are around—you're going to know he's aiming that story at you. All of a sudden it hits you! It's like an arrow…when it's strong it goes in deep and starts working on your mind right away. No one says anything to you, only that story is all, but you know that people have been watching you and talking about you…So you have to think about your life.
>
> Then you feel weak, real weak, like you are sick…That story is working on you now. You keep thinking about it…So you want to live better. After a while, you don't like to think of what you did wrong. So you try to forget that story. You try to pull that arrow out…
>
> …But you won't forget that story. You're going to see the place where it happened, maybe everyday if it's nearby and close to Cibecue…It doesn't matter if you get old—that place will keep on stalking you…
>
> (1996, p. 58)

The above examples give a small taste of the variety of oral culture, both in terms of genre and setting. Some are word for word, some improvised, some informal, some ritualised. Some are poetry, some songs, some speeches, some recitation. The list goes on, their diversity defying absolute definition. They can exist in highly literate societies and individuals, as well as the more commonly documented 'non-literate' cultures. We must then query whether the terminology 'oral culture' is valid. Orality should be recognised as an aspect of culture rather than a strict demarcation.

2.2 Orality & Literacy

It is impossible to discuss orality in any detail without recognising the supposedly polar alternative 'literate culture'. Indeed, this oral versus literate divide has enflamed debate over the last forty years, consequently prompting some academics to query the validity of 'oral culture', deeming it an ethnocentric, artificially imposed classification (Finnegan, 1988, Street, 1984).

As can be noted from the previous section, oral culture (viewed as a facet of society) manifests itself in overwhelming diversity, thus increasing the difficulty of formulating a comprehensive definition. Attempts to define oral culture from a perspective of differentiating it from that of literate culture have been made by examining cognitive differences (Olson, 1994, 1996, 1991). However, yet again, the diverse nature of orality makes any generalisations virtually nonsensical and the results, with respect to this debate, serve largely to disparage existing oversimplifications.

Since Goody & Watt's apocryphal article on 'The Implications of Literacy' (1968), communication technology (including literacy) has reached into previously unexposed communities, blurring the boundary between supposedly distinct oral and literate societies. This then bears a closer resemblance to the state of storytelling in Scotland; storytellers are part of an oral tradition, yet function as highly literate individuals in a literate, technological society.

The implications of literacy

> …it is quite likely that literacy's contributions are neither well appreciated nor are its limitations grasped.
>
> (Graff, 1981, p. 1)

In order to understand the character of oral culture it is necessary to consider the influence of literacy in terms of societal and cognitive effects. There are two main schools of thought, namely the 'autonomous' model proposed largely by Goody and Watt (1968) and the 'ideological' model coined by Street (1984).

Goody and Watt claimed that literacy as a technology was responsible for 'raising consciousness'—promoting abstraction and reflection. The inconsistencies present in oral cultures' belief systems are removed by referent written records, leading to a more critical attitude of the world. Democracy, it was argued, is an outcome of literacy, as demonstrated by the classical Greek democratic system.

> And so, not long after the widespread diffusion of writing throughout the Greek world, and the recording of the previously oral cultural tradition, there arose an attitude to the past very different from that common in non-literate societies. Instead of the unobtrusive adaptation of past tradition to present needs, a great many individuals found in the written records, where much of their traditional cultural repertoire had been given permanent form, so many inconsistencies in the beliefs and categories of understanding handed down to them that they were impelled to a much more conscious, comparative and critical attitude to the accepted world picture, and notably to the notions of God, the universe and the past.
>
> (Goody and Watt, 1968, p. 48)

It was claimed this shift from oral to literate promoted an individualistic society, com-pared to a communal, 'collective memory' based society, because 'literate society leaves more to its members; less homogenous in its cultural tradition, it gives more free play to the individual' (Goody and Watt, 1968, p. 63).

This highly influential work cast literacy as an autonomous agent and illustrated the 'Great Divide' theory cast between oral and literate societies. It was also endorsed by Walter J. Ong who stated that writing led to the 'evolution of consciousness', provided composition techniques, and the ability to create intricate narrative (Ong, 1977).

> Without writing, not only tightly plotted lengthy narrative but also the kind of mental processes which go with the composition of even an encyclopaedia article, not to mention more massive scholarly and scientific treatises, would be unthinkable in the fullest sense of this term. Oral culture cannot organize information in this sequentiality. Writing has made possible not only development of science and technology as well as of the humanities (that is, the study of language, history, philosophy, theology, and other subjects having to do with man not as a physical being or an organism, but with man as a self-conscious being and thus with the life of the mind and with freedom); it has also made possible the complex relationships be-tween large groups of people which a fully populated planet demands.
>
> (Ong, 1977, p. 256)

By comparison, more recent debate has focussed on the complexity of oral cultures. Street (1984) developed the ideological' model—an amalgamation of responses from Finnegan, Bloch, Graff and others to the general claim of literacy described above. This model places more emphasis on the importance of society on literacy, i.e. 'the meaning of literacy depends upon the social institutions in which it is embedded' (Street, 1984, p. 8).

Whilst Ruth Finnegan agrees that writing *can* promote abstraction she argues that oral cultures can have abstraction and be aware of language as a construct, using the Limba and Dogon people of West Africa as examples; 'their reflectiveness strikes an observer immediately in the interest they take in their own language and in their philosophy of speech' (Finnegan, 1988). Another factor Finnegan cites against the autonomous theory is the diversity of oral compositions and genres, even within the same society.

Maurice Bloch also subscribes to the view that literacy does not necessarily negate the oral tradition of a culture. He draws on his own experience with the Merina of Madagascar where he claims that literacy has

strengthened their oral culture: 'literacy has not transformed the nature of Merina knowledge—it has confirmed it' (Bloch, 1998). As Bloch explains:

> The written word was, and by are large still is, seen as a form of ancestral oratory. As a result it is largely treated in similar ways as oral Kabary. People without authority have no right to use it, and if they do they are ridiculous. What has been written once should be repeated in further writings and publications. It should be carefully transmitted from authoritative person to authoritative person. Written documents are not, any more than the words of a respected elder who uses the style of ancestral oratory, open to critical examination and evaluation.
>
> (Bloch, 1998, p. 160)

David R. Olson (1996) appears to situate himself in the middle of these views, he admits that oral culture and the autonomy of literacy is too encompassing but feels that literacy does effect cognitive changes, so narrows the terminology to 'Western scientific thought'. He views writing as a model for speech and stresses that writing is not speech transcribed but that the very process of reflecting on language as constituent components (represented by a script) affects cognition as speech is brought into consciousness. He argues therefore, that this metalinguistic knowledge of language is a key to 'literate' cognition. However, he acknowledges that such metalinguistic or 'literate skills' can be passed on orally (Olson, 1991).

Many case studies show that literacy does not produce predictable predefinable effects and the complexity of reality indicates that the 'autonomous' model is simplistic at best. However, there is substantial evidence that cognitive differences exist, that literacy is an important component within society and has a significant effect. The problems arise in trying to determine just what that effect is and how separable it is from political and social factors. There can be no doubt about the differences between speech and writing. *Writing becomes decontextualised*. It can be harder to interpret the author's meaning when the illocutionary force of speech is lost. No where is this more apparent than on the Internet, where emoticons, such as :-) for happy and :-(for sad, were developed to try and address the lack of context.

The traditional 'literate' values of abstraction, reflection, critical thought

and genres have been shown to exist in differing forms throughout both literate and non-literate cultures, thus refuting Goody et al's claim that literacy has all encompassing cognitive, pre-definable effects. This is not to say that literacy is not powerful, but that its effects depending upon the society it is applied to.

2.3 Dominant Senses: Visual vs. Aural

Western society is visually dominant but this is not the only way. Alfred Gell (1995) describes the auditory culture of the forest-encapsulated Umeda in Papua New Guinea in terms of language analysis; '"mountain" (sis) should be understood precisely as "the sound that a mountain makes", or more precisely "the shape in articulatory acoustic space" made by a mountain'. He also recounts the initially confusing experience of gathering understanding of what it means to live in an auditory culture:

> For us, invisible objects are deeply problematic, but not for the Umeda, who defined objective existence in terms of audibility, not visibility. This came out in conflicts over 'evidence' which I often had with my informants. Once an Umeda man I knew well came into my house looking as if he had just had the fright of his life and bursting to tell me about the harrowing experience he had just had. He had been on a forest path leading to the village and he had been chased up and down by a yawt, a horrifying kind of ogre in who all Umeda firmly believe. The dusk had fallen and the forest was plunged in more than the usual darkness, but, yes, the ogre had been there all right, waiting. He had heard it panting hu-hu-hu, and he had raced up the path to escape it, but the ogre had doubled round, hiddenly (maksmaks) and before he knew it, the thing was right in front of him, going hu-hu-hu again and he had had to cut through the forest to avoid it. Finally, rejoining the path, he had made it home as quick as his legs would carry him. 'Yes, yes,' I said, cutting him off, 'but did you actually see the ogre?' My informant looked at me in perplexity. 'It was dark, I was running away, it was there on the path, going hu-hu-hu'…I came away from this conversation, and from similar ones, as puzzled as ever about how such sensible people as the Umeda could remain so cred-

> ulous on the subject of ogres and other terrifying apparitions. When, I wondered, was an Umeda going to admit to actually seeing one of these mon-ters? But that, of course, was a misapprehension bred of a visually based notion of the real. For Umeda, hearing is believing, and the Umeda really do hear ogres, or what they take to be ogres.
>
> (Gell, 1995, p. 238)

Steven Feld (2003) tells a similar tale of the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea. In both instances, sound is the principal sense. Visibility is low due to the density of the forest so sound becomes the 'truth', i.e. rather than the, 'believe it when I see it' premise, it is, 'believe it when I hear it.' Predators are hidden in the forest, so sight becomes a secondary sense because 'sound can't be hidden' (Feld, 2003).

This is not to suggest that new technologies should necessarily adopt sensory interfaces or have purely auditory interfaces, but merely shows alternative ways of thinking about vision and its dominance. Increasingly, commercial products are addressing this issue and recent market addition have much more tactile interfaces, such as Microsoft's Surface (a multi-touch table), the iPhone, Nintendo's Wii and Apple's latest offering, the iPad.

Don Ihde stresses the whole body sensorial experience, we hear with the whole body (e.g. sound vibrations), we see with the whole body:

> …there is at least a weak sense in which, unlike blindness, there is never a case of total deafness. The graduations of hearing shade off into a larger sense of one's body in listening. The ears may be focal "organs" of hearing, but one listens with his whole body.
>
> (Ihde, 1976, p. 138)

In a seminar entitled 'Hearing the Unhearable' (St Andrews University, November 2006) Ihde showed images of sound transposed into visual (e.g. ultrasound scans, geo-physical land scans) and conversely examples of conventionally 'visual' data transposed into audio (e.g. orbiting satellite wobble through a synthesiser to sound like hotel lobby muzak). Ihde claims that if the ear was trained as well as the eye then the audio data would be as valuable as the visual is currently. Interestingly, he cited print as one of

the constraining factors in that academic publications are printed. Sound, if discussed at all, is shown as a visual waveform.

There is some evidence to suggest that in the near future representation of sound and time may not be displayed visually and linearly. Online journals have the potential to link and listen to sounds in real-time and some conferences now accept video submissions, e.g. CHI.

Similarly, Manovich (2001) claims that the dominant language of interface design is now based on the cinematic paradigm rather than print culture. Cinematic lan-guage is a learned literacy nonetheless.

Kress (2000) considers all texts and language to be multimodal systems. Information is conveyed not only through words but also by the modes of tone, pitch and prosody. Multimodality also appears through culturally-defined cues. Herbert & Robinson (2001) describe some of the semiotic systems in Ghana where women dress in a way that lets others know whether they are married or single, and 'scarves are worn in certain ways to indicate that they have had a row with their husbands'. They pose the question—can this be defined as a type of literacy? It is a non-textual form of communication in which knowledge of the symbols is required for interpretation. Another example is that of Khipu (systems of intricately knotted cord) used by Incas, traditionally thought to be a form of abacus for recording resources, however recent research has suggested that they functioned as a mnemonic device to aid performers' recall of historical events. So the already blurred boundary between orality and literacy is further compounded by the addition of these multimodalities and multiliteracies.

The complexity in determining what is oral culture and what is literate culture is intensified by the realisation that literacy is not a singular entity. We all adopt different literacies based on the type of task we want to complete, for example, composing a shopping list differs from writing a letter to a bank. Herbert & Robinson (2001) categorise literacies as either imposed (completing 'an official form') or self-generated ('as in the writing of a personal letter'). This splintering of literacy is more striking in a multilingual setting. Herbert & Robinson note this effect in Ghana where education is attempting to redress the balance in favour of oral tradition. The Dega children learn to start English stories with 'Once upon a time' and end 'happily ever after' but also apply their local oral traditions to Dega written stories, beginning them with 'Ya mole mola' ('Let's tell stories') and

ending with 'Ya sa jegle jeg' ('Let's dance and shake'). This merely emphasises the importance of social context once again.

Whilst language is primarily a means of communication, it also establishes a sense of identity (for example consider the different uses of language between generations). Literacies are extensions of this (e.g. graffiti tags) as Herbert & Robinson noted in their study in Ghana where 'proverbs in local languages are painted on bicycles, on passenger lorries and on houses. It is as though people are saying "This is mine, and this is where I come from."'(2001, p. 131)

The Internet provides a platform for communities to form and develop online identities, especially in the increasingly common case of geographically displaced communities. There is a strong Somalia online presence[1] for a culture increasingly maligned by the British press. In turn, this means that each culture brings its own forms of literacy to the technological interface, along with the culture's own varying degree of orality.

2.4 Literacy as a technology

So what are the outcomes from this discussion? How can literacy and orality impact upon technology? Firstly, literacy *is* a technology. 'It initiated what printing and electronics only continued, the physical reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent space, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone real, spoken words exist.' (Ong, 1986, p. 30) Like many new technologies today, literacy was met with resistance from some quarters when it was invented. Plato thought that it would lead to an erosion of memory. Similar claims have been made with the advent of computing, calculators and video games (Birkerts, 1996, Postman, 1993, Carr, 2008).

> Writing, Plato has Socrates say in the Phaedrus, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can only be in the mind. Writing is simply a thing, something to be manipulated, something inhuman, artificial, a manufactured product. We recognize here the same complaint that is made against computers: they are artificial contrivances, foreign to human life.
>
> Secondly, Plato's Socrates complains, a written text is basically unresponsive. If you ask a person to explain his or her statement, you can

> get at least an attempt at explanation: if you ask a text, you get nothing except the same, often stupid words which called for your question in the first place…So deeply are we into literacy that we fail commonly to recognize that this objection applies every bit as much to books as to computers.
>
> (Ong, 1986, p. 27)

From a personal viewpoint, I find myself using a calculator for simple sums through force of habit, and my rote learning of times tables has deserted me. As-you-type spellchecks not only autocorrect my wildly inaccurate typing but have started to erode my spelling. So Plato was right—in a sense.

The Internet has both aided and subverted this process. Web pages can be 'book-marked' for perusal later, Wikipedia offers access to reams of information at the click of a mouse, 'Google' has become a verb, reducing the need to store information ourselves. On the other hand, it is easy to question authors on their blog or online articles, or via Twitter. The written text is no longer fixed, but becomes responsive and mutable.

We are now able to access more data than was ever thought possible, through physical artefacts such as documents, books and paintings but also through the Internet. Our memory has become externalised.

Just as the Internet could not have developed without the existence of computers, computers as we know them could not have been created without literacy. It has directly affected their development, in terms of the increasing abstraction of code from binary to assembly towards more natural language, not to mention the heavily text-driven interfaces and content. This shaping through literacy is an example of the con-textual nature of technology. As Conway's Law (Herbsleb and Grinter, 1999) states that the design of computer systems reflects the underlying structure of the organisation creating them, so too on a larger scale technology reflects the social and cultural structure of the society creating them. Technology not only *affects* but also *reflects* the social and cultural structure of the society creating it. (See Bridge *What is New Media?* for a discussion on technological determinism.)

Literacy is viewed in Western society as an elemental birthright and is a necessity for full participation in the modern world. Increasing globalisa-

tion spreads these values across the planet. The homogenisation our inflexible technology demands leads not only to the loss of cultural heritage in terms of folklore and societal structures, but is to the detriment of many already marginalised (and potentially un-codified) indigenous languages. It is telling that it was only in late 2009 that the first Arabic (i.e. non-roman character) Internet domain names opened (Arthur, BBC, 2009). What is the worth of oral literature? Should remaining primary oral cultures give up their way of life to the dominant literate societies? Although studies (Bloch 1998) have found that orality may be strengthened by literacy, this does not take into account the unknown effects of adding computers into the equation. Is technology destined to interact with oral culture only in the role of acting in preserving an outdated mode of communication or is the situation more complex than that?

The One Laptop Per Child[2] (OLPC) scheme, set up in attempts to provide educational computers to children in the developing world, has been dogged by criticism and lack of sales. OLPC, also known as the $100 laptop[3], was originally envisioned as a mass purchase by governments in one million order lots, they are now on offer individually. Although there has been some success, such as in Uruguay, which has purchased laptops for every school child, it has not been universally accepted. Competitors have sprung up (OLPC is a non-profit organisation) and underlying motivations have been questioned, including the extent of open source software in use (Windows XP and Linux are both options for the XO-1).

It is however, somewhat concerning to me that despite admirable aims, the OLPC seems to have minimal connections with the end users concerning design of the lap-top. Has sufficient thought been given to the integration of (potentially non-codified) languages? Is this another case of act in haste, repent at leisure? Obviously, denying computers and access to technology is a form of oppression, but throwing a Western (essentially North American) technology at an entire demographic will undoubtedly have ramifications, and may prove detrimental to traditional forms of communication and culture.

Many 'developed' nations are now struggling to retain and restore their cultural, and largely minority, heritage through artificial means. For example, consider government attempts to promote Gaelic in Scotland through the *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005*, and similar approaches in New

Zealand with Māori culture (*2003 Māori Language Strategy*). There is even an attempt underway to promote and protect Scots as a language in its own right (The-Scottish-Government, 2010). We should be wary of creating such a legacy for other countries.

Literacy can be a tool for liberation and equality but equally it can be a force for oppression as swathes of society are labelled 'non-literates', consigned to second-class citizenship (Pattanayak, 1991). Simply applying Western literacy to a community without consideration of the economic and social setting is sufficient. As Pattanayak succinctly phrases, 'literacy is not a solution to all problems, but a problem to be looked at in its own right'. (1991, p. 105)

2.5 Post-literacy

We have seen that literacy is capable of transformation into multiple literacies to fit the social context. Shirley Brice Heath (1986) draws on her empirical work on literacy in the Southeastern United States. Her comparative case studies look at the ways literacy is used in two marginalised communities whose children are deemed unsuccessful in school, namely Roadville (white working-class) and Trackton (black working-class). The results show substantial differences in writing and reading, in Trackton reading is often a group event with the audience discussing the content whilst in Roadville reading is considered an important skill, yet little reading actually occurs and is mainly used to 'gain information for practical needs of daily life (telephone dials, clocks, bills and checks, labels on products, reminder notes, school messages, patterns for dressmaking.)' (Heath, 1986, p. 221)

Gunther Kress (2003) describes how print-based literacy is being affected by computer screens and how writing has to contend with visualisation and experience its effects. In essence, 'alphabetic writing is undergoing changes in its uses and in its forms as significant as any that it has experienced in the three or four thousand years of its history'. (Kress, 2003, p. 10)

This adaptability is not an intrinsic part of literacy, but of mankind. Malleability is also extended to media and technology (SMS on mobile phones was not designed to be the mobile-to-mobile phenomenon it has grown to be and is itself another example of the appropriation of literacy). Email is

now used in a variety of settings, e.g. workplace and socialising. Technology is appropriated to fit the needs of people ('the "killer application" of the internet turns out to be other human beings' Bargh & McKenna (2004) quoting Kang 2000). The medium is tempered to the situation.

McLuhan (1964) stated that the shift from a rich, complex primary oral culture to literacy caused the development of an individualistic, homogeneous culture obsessed with 'efficiency and practicality'. Whilst this is based on the concept of literacy acting as an autonomous agent, there is perhaps a grain of truth resonant in the increasing globalisation and mass commercialisation of Western society today. As is discussed in the later section, *Connections between New Media & Storytelling*, there is evidence to suggest that we are now moving into post-literacy; secondary orality is widespread. Expanding McLuhan's theory, we are now moving from an 'individualistic' literate culture to a complex, constantly shifting individualistic e-culture characterised by the fragmentation of the self into a multiplicity of identity through dispersed online presences. As literacy externalises our memory so the Internet externalises our identity. McLuhan claimed that 'with electricity we extend our central nervous system globally, instantly interrelating every human experience'.

'Secondary orality', as coined by Ong in 1971, attempted to account for the non-textual forms of communication developed by the modern world, i.e. radio and television. His 'secondary orality' is reminiscent of 'primary orality' and can be considered to embody other electronic communications including email, mobile telephony and the Internet. Ong (1986) stated that 'secondary orality' is born 'out of high-literacy cultures, depending for its invention and operation on the widespread cultivation of writing and reading'.

2.6 Storytelling & Literate Culture

We have explored some of the issues surrounding orality and mulitliteracies, let us now turn our attention to the impact of literacy on folktales. Today's Western oral storytelling exists as a subset of literate culture and so has naturally been impacted upon by the advent of writing. Not only have many tales been inscribed for wider dissemination, but their written adaptations have also provoked scholarly debate on their natures and pur-

poses (Zipes, 1983, Warner, 1994). As we shall see, folktales have also been subject to intense scrutiny by those on the quest to find the universal story, dissecting plots and characters in a bid to identify their genetic sequences (Booker, 2005, Campbell, 1993, Propp, 1968, Warner, 1994). Yet despite this oral storytelling persists and the proliferation of stories through print and digital forms is testimony to our continuing desire for narrative.

Social context of storytelling and stories

Stories are not created in a vacuum. They naturally reflect and speak to the society they are told in, whether this is through reinforcing cultural values or attempting to subvert authoritarian figures (Zipes, 1983, Warner, 1994). Once fixed in print though, stories retain their form though society alters around them. Periodically they are rewritten to reflect or impose desirable values. Either way, considerable debate and analysis on their value to contemporary society has taken place.

In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes debunks the myth that fairy tales are above critical reproof, the sense that one should not 'dissect or study fairy tales in a socio-political context, for that might ruin their magic power' (1983, p. 1). The development of the fairy tale genre, he argues, came from authors 'purposely appropriating' folktales as a 'civilizing agent' to promote morals and values of the social code at the time, including Perrault, Grimm and Andersen:

> The Grimms gathered their tales primarily from petit bourgeois or educated middle-class people, who had already introduced bour-geois notions into their versions. In all cases the Grimms did more than simply change and improve the style of the tales: they ex-panded them and made substantial changes in characters and meaning.
>
> (Zipes, 1983, p. 47)

By contrast, other authors in the later nineteenth century attempted to subvert the status quo; for example Oscar Wilde and George MacDonald 'refused to comply with the standard notions of sexuality and sex roles and questioned the restrictions placed on the imagination of children.' (Zipes, 1983, p. 101)

Similarly Marina Warner also seeks to place fairy tales in a social and historical context. In *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994) she examines the role of women in folk-tales, both as characters and as tellers. As she notes, many female authors of fairy tales have now receded from view, and though they were written for and consumed by an adult audience, the shift gradually changed towards a focus on children.

The Quest for a Grand Unified Story

> "Tell us a story," demanded the bigger of the small girls.
>
> "Once upon a time," began the bachelor, "there was a little girl called Bertha, who was extra-ordinarily good."
>
> The children's momentarily-aroused interest began at once to flicker; all stories seemed dreadfully alike, no matter who told them.
>
> "She did all that she was told, she was always truthful, she kept her clothes clean, ate milk puddings as though they were jam tarts, learned her lessons perfectly, and was polite in her manners."
>
> "Was she pretty?" asked the bigger of the small girls.
>
> "Not as pretty as any of you," said the bachelor, "but she was horribly good."
>
> There was a wave of reaction in favour of the story; the word horrible in connection with goodness was a novelty that commended itself. It seemed to introduce a ring of truth that was absent from the aunt's tales of infant life.
>
> Saki The Storyteller (2000)

Similarities between stories and the recurrence of themes and motifs in folktales are often apparent, and the children in Saki's *The Storyteller* are well aware of conventional moralistic tales. Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) concerns Russian folktales, breaking them down into thirty-one discrete functions, which describe the structural elements of the tale as assigned to its characters. Georges Polti's *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* (1954) is of a similar vein, identifying thirty-six plots which can be used to describe stories. Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots* (2005) cites seven general themes, each containing a substructure of stages; overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, com-

edy, tragedy, and rebirth. Booker notes that not all stories can fall into the seven categories, but that all fully resolved stories can, and generally 'darkness is overcome, and light wins the day.' (2005, p. 219)

Yet the holy grail for some seems to be discovering the ultimate story, the Grand Unified Story if you will, that unlocks the key to all others, and which defines a framework through which all stories can be described. Campbell's monomyth (drawing on Jungian archetypes) is one such example, aiming to connect similarities between mythologies into a nuclear unit of separation—initiation—return. In essence the mono-myth is:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.
>
> (Campbell, 1993, p. 30)

This thesis does not examine in detail, or make use of, the structural qualities of narratives (e.g. Propp's Morphology or Labov & Waletzky's functional narrative analysis, 2003). It is clear that constraining or defining the number of possible stories by necessity results in a paring down of cultural nuances which make the stories what they are. A lot of meaning in stories is dependent on hearing the tale at the right occasion, and understanding and awareness of the social context. The definition of storytelling used in this thesis embodies cultural aspects and the structuralism and abstraction of narrative run counter to this approach. The appealing simplification of stories into archetypes or monomyths can lead to the problem where, as Toelken describes, 'irrespective of the universality of archetypal images, different cultures organize and interpret (and thus understand) the symbols quite differently.' (1996, p. 42)

Zipes points out the shortfalls of this approach too;

> Like Propp and Luthi, Teneze favors the structural approach to explain the essence of the magic folk tale. In other words, it is through the structure or composition of the tale that we can gain an understanding of its meaning or enunciation, what it is trying to communicate. The difficulty with this approach, as Teneze realizes, is that, if

> all folk tales have essentially the same 'morphology' (even though the functions may be varied), they all express the same thing, some kind of universal statement about the plight of humanity. The form itself is its meaning, and the historicity of the individual creator (or creators) and society disappears. Such formalist approaches to folk and fairy tales account in great part for the reason why we see the tales as universal, ageless, and eternal. The tendency here is to homogenize creative efforts so that the differences of human and social acts become blurred.
>
> (Zipes, 1983, p. 5)

2.7 The Fixity of Stories

Goody and Watt's theory of the autonomous agency of literacy, detailed earlier, suggests that amongst other benefits, literacy removes inconsistencies in oral culture, re-placing them with definitive versions in print. Whilst this theory of the implications of literacy has fallen out of favour, it is still widely quoted. Yet in print there remains a multitude of virtually identical folktales, and the Internet has only served to further this. For example, to take one story, known variously as *Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots*, *The Boy and the Boots*, and *The Cow who Ate the Piper*, there are numerous printed versions (DeFelice, 2000, Proulx, 1999), including a ballad, all alike enough that they are one and the same story, yet all slightly different. Some of this is due to deliberate angling on the part of the author (e.g. an illustrated children's book) but the key trait in traditional storytelling of 'making the story your own' has been carried over to print. Many stories are found on the Internet too of course, on websites and blogs, both visually and aurally via video and online radio stations, and this merely increases the multitude of story versions.

Though similarities may be made across the network of stories, they have never remained static or fixed in the details, and it looks as if digital technology will not halt this process any more than literacy has.

2.8 Conclusions

This chapter has shown the tempestuous background debates on 'orality' and 'literacy.' It is now widely recognised that the initially presumed dichotomy between literate and oral culture is now more commonly viewed as a spectrum. Literacy has elements of orality, and orality has elements of literacy. Add to this complexity the fact that there are very few non-literate cultures left, the notion of contemporary storytelling in Scotland, with its blend of oral and literate tradition, does not seem to be such a vastly unusual scenario.

A quick review of the literature surrounding the content of storytelling (i.e. primarily folk and fairy-tales) only serves to reinforce this blend of oral and literate. As Jack Zipes (1983) has demonstrated, even generally accepted, supposedly 'fixed' and authentic texts like the Brothers Grimm were subject to copious revisions, editing from the oral to the written, to the socially and politically acceptable. The intrinsic malleability of oral texts, which is only manifested at a much slower pace in written versions, is a general feature of orality (although the transmission of Vedas is a glaring example of the fixity of orality). This malleability will be noted in later chapters as a current attribute of storytelling.

Similarly, to a lesser extent, the 'collective memory' discussed in this chapter also exists in contemporary storytelling and will be noted in chapter 9.

But crucially, the diversity, amongst other attributes of orality and multiliteracies, have demonstrated that social context is important. The local is important, specificity is important. And for these reasons, this body of research focuses on Blether Tay-gither, a small storytelling club in Scotland, drawing on the wider Scotland network for comparisons and verification on the cultural community.

Notes

1. Camel Milk Bulletin Board http://www.somaliaonline.com/cgi-bin/ubb/ultimatebb.cgi, Somali Buzz: http://somali-buzz.com, & http://heesta.com. Accessed 3 March 2010.
2. http://laptop.org/en. Accessed 3 March 2010.
3. The $100 moniker is a bit of a misnomer, so far, no prototypes have been delivered at this cost, perhaps due to smaller sales than anticipated.

Chapter 3
Studying Storytelling

> There are no stories out there waiting to be told and no certain truths waiting to be recorded; there are only stories yet to be constructed.
>
> Interpretive Ethnography, Denzin, 1997, p. 267

THE research of an oral art form such as storytelling immediately suggests a social anthropological approach, following in the footsteps of, amongst others, Ruth Finnegan, and the key elements of such an approach are documented in the following pages. However, the main difficulty in representing a culture like contemporary storytelling occurs in the transition from oral telling to printed word, where flat textual renderings can strip context and atmosphere from live events. Autoethnography offers a solution to this problem by infusing texts with a sense of live experience, and consequently the narrative ethnographic approach adopted in this thesis is explained.

The body of research detailed in this thesis is exploratory, seeking to understand the world of storytelling (as a contemporary example of oral culture) and examining parallels with the world of digital technology. This novel, interdisciplinary field of re-search is relatively uncharted, and subsequently demands that any data gathering methods applied are adaptable and, crucially, *responsive*. These methods include ethnography's participant observation, which is utilised primarily in the novel case of the researcher becoming gatekeeper in an evolving study group. It is important to consider issues of truth, authenticity and researcher bias; as Denzin's opening quote illustrates, a multiplicity of truths and narratives exist, generated from the cultural stance of re-searcher, author and reader.

3.1 An Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography, the descriptive fieldwork element of anthropology, has become a popular method in many research areas including corporate ethnography (Suri and Howard, 2006) and information technology (Miller and Slater, 2000) with companies such as Intel, Microsoft and Nokia now recognising the need for a deeper understanding of people and their social interactions.

Ethnography is characterised by long-term immersive field studies in close proximity with informants and is virtually synonymous with 'participant observation'. Participant observation describes the traditional balancing act of participating in the society in question whilst retaining a subjective stance as observer. It is a fine line between becoming too close to the community to reflect and remaining too detached to under-stand. The central premise is that 'objective accounts of society could be given by objective observers.' (Denzin, 1997, p. 252)

Ethnography has much to offer in deepening our understanding of orality in literate society. As Denzin, quoting Ong, notes,

> Seeing is not understanding. Understanding is more than visual knowledge. Understanding is visceral. The fully interpretive text plunges the reader into the interior; feeling, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching worlds of subjective human perception (Ong, 1977, p. 137).
>
> (Denzin, 1997, p. 46)

Intrinsic to ethnography is the descriptive means of disseminating the study and analysis, i.e. the '-graphy' written element. Conventional dispassionate 'scientific' style writing is being challenged by a range of genres, some of which are highly reflective personal 'autoethnographies' (Cesara, 1982, Ellis and Bochner, 2002). Others experiment with poetry, drama and impressionistic vignettes in 'messy texts' (Brady, 2003, Denzin, 1997), whilst visual anthropology is becoming established as a field in its own right, interpreting and presenting findings through evocative observational cinema (MacDougall and Taylor, 1998).

Anthropology is increasingly finding new sites for research and observa-

tion through the social spaces provided by technology (Stone, 2000, Boellstorff, 2008). For example virtual environments such as Second Life, social networking sites like Facebook and even Twitter are now offering untapped opportunities for studying communities (boyd et al., 2010, Krotoski, 2009, Richards, 2009). The approach to this 'virtual ethnography' (Miller and Slater, 2000, Hine, 2000, Crichton and Kinash, 2003) is similar to more conventional studies, excepting the obvious geographic separation. Participant observation of events may for example take place in chatrooms as opposed to physical observation of rituals. Hine (2000) views the Internet both as a culture in itself and a product of culture, or cultural artefact. She emphasises the flexibility and reflexivity of ethnography (both 'real' and 'virtual') where the 'methodology of an ethnography is in-separable from the contexts in which it is employed' (Hine, 2000, p. 13).

Blether Tay-gither

As ethnography is the traditional framework when researching orality, it may be assumed that this research adopts a similar approach. Yet it is important to recognise that this is not a sociological thesis, nor a purely ethnographic piece of research; rather it is an 'ethno-esque' study influenced by design ethnography (i.e. the application of ethnographic techniques in design problem solving contexts). One of the reasons for this is an awareness of the difficulty in translating results and findings to design or technological recommendations. Anthropological ethnography is created as an end in itself however increasingly both long-term traditional field studies and short-term, week-long studies with user groups are classified as 'ethnographies'. Dourish (2006) highlights and queries the suitability of this trend to use applied ethnography to provide specific guidelines for design. This may be an issue in terminology, that is,

> The defining characteristic of ethnographic investigation is taken to be its spatiotemporal organization – that the ethnographer goes somewhere, observes, returns and reports.
>
> (Dourish, 2006)

The approach adopted in this study is reminiscent of traditional ethnog-

raphy in several ways. Firstly the group in question, storytellers in Scotland, have been contacted and observed by the author for over three years (extended periods of study are characteristic of ethnography.) My research has been open, that is, there was never any attempt to conceal my identity as a researcher, appropriate ethical considerations were made and approval was obtained when conducting formalised interviews. Interactions with the group progressed from that of an outsider and observer to participating in story sessions as a listener and as a teller. This process has included attending several storytelling workshops and a residential course at Emerson College in order to better understand and experience first-hand the dimensions of telling.

Generally, ethnographers gain access to existing study groups in a different culture from their native setting. However, native ethnography (where research is undertaken by members of the community) is becoming more common (Drew, 2001, Fournillier, 2009, Ortiz, 1969), driving the trend away from colonialism and ethnocentric tendencies. In one sense, I was native to the group as a born Scot (though having grown up largely in England I lack many of the localised dialect words and intonations), yet I was also an outsider in that I was not previously part of the storytelling community.

A more substantial deviation from traditional anthropological studies arose in this research in the nature and development of the study group. Storytelling in Scotland is a thriving activity, benefiting enormously from the central directive provided by the Scottish Storytelling Centre, and professionally accredited tellers are distributed across Scotland. Despite this network being in operation, when I began my research there was no focus for storytelling in Dundee. The nearest clubs were Edinburgh's Guid Crack club (60 miles away), Glasgow's Better Crack club (80 miles away) and Aberdeen's GAS (Grampian Association of Storytellers, 65 miles away). The founding of the Dundee Storytelling Group grew from an initial workshop on Peace and Reconciliation at the Dundee Chaplaincy Centre in the University of Dundee. Approximately a month later in March 2007 we held our first club night and, thanks to sup-port from the Scottish Storytelling Centre, our members included tellers from Dundee and the surrounding areas. Apart from three organisers, no one from the original work-shop turned up, yet the interest was such that the group is

still running almost three years later.

Therefore, in this research the approach to the study group was radically different. Instead of finding an existing group, the Dundee Storytelling Group offered a focal point for the already existing storytelling network and provided me with a clear opportunity to integrate myself into the network through close involvement with the setting up and development of the new storytelling club.

3.2 Observing Storytelling

It is important here to note the scope of observation undertaken for this research. The intent was always to investigate storytelling as a community and practice in the context of technology, i.e. to understand storytellers' relationship with digital media and their views regarding it, *not* the nuances of telling to different audiences. Therefore there was no requirement for detailed shadowing of tellers in professional settings (which would be largely school based). A happy side-effect of this eliminated the need for me to go through the relatively time consuming Disclosure Scotland approval process. More importantly however, I was keen to shift away from the traditional paradigm of storytelling as merely fodder for children. Whilst in retrospect it may have been interesting to observe storytelling in more varied settings, it was and still is deemed superfluous to this piece of work on storytelling and new media.

Thus it was that the storytelling I generally observed was that of club storytelling and platform telling at the Scottish Storytelling Centre and other venues. This tight focus on types of telling was especially useful in the context of the Dundee Storytelling Group where club meetings are invariably informal and discussion on the nature of the stories told is encouraged. These impromptu reflective sessions were very useful to verifying my impressions on storytelling in Scotland and on gaining a more grounded knowledge of the tellers' thoughts towards their vocation. I have been participating in monthly storytelling sessions at Blether Tay-gither since they began in March 2007 (each of which last over two hours). As part of the Blether Tay-gither steering group (which meets each month in addition to the storytelling evenings) I have developed a close relationship with the more experienced tellers in the club. (There are eight members in

the steering group, including myself.) Furthermore, I began attending the Scottish Storytelling Forum meetings in 2009, which gave me an insight into how the Centre and Forum work as a whole and indeed, have just been voted in as a committee member.

In the wider storytelling community, I attended and participated in three Better Crack Club meetings (Glasgow) and two Guid Crack club nights (Edinburgh). I took part in over seven workshops and network days in Edinburgh at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, and attended a residential weekend course at Emerson College, and also helped organise and attend workshops run by Blether Tay-gither. In addition, I was part of Blether during our Family Fun day, combining storytelling and craft activities, and at the Big Tent Festival. Finally, I have observed many storytelling events at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, and at Festival at the Edge (an annual storytelling festival in Shropshire).

Apart from formalised interviews, these participant observation sessions were not videotaped, this was a deliberate choice as past experience in conducting interviews with some of the tellers showed that many of them were uncomfortable being re-corded. It was felt that taping these sessions would introduce a sense of formality and stiffness previously unknown into the stories and discussions. Individual storytelling in-stances were not under rigorous interpretation, rather general attributes of telling were being observed, so it was not critical that tellings were recorded. Similarly, I did not take written notes of the sessions at the time as I felt that this would detract from the atmosphere and run the risk of being considered disrespectful. Therefore, notes were written up after the meetings. This negated the need for developing a means of shorthand coding for capturing interaction between group members and in cataloguing individual tellings (Finnegan, 1992).

Ethnography demands meticulous data gathering, however I was not so very fastidious and recorded general summaries and impressions of events ('headnotes' Wol-cott, 1995, p. 97) through written notes post-event rather than detailed, specific ob-servations at the time. Yet as Gregory Bateson notes in his Naven epilogue (1958), not all anthropologists capture all the detail they later require. This is made harder in traditional anthropology by their inability to further clarify and question points with in-formants upon their return to academia (due to geographical and technological commu-

nication limitations).

> [W]e set out to do the impossible, to collect an exceedingly complex and entirely foreign culture in a few months; and every sincere anthropologist when he comes back to England discovers shocking gaps in his field work.
>
> (Bateson, 1958, p. 257)

The benefit of my research is that the study group is still in situ so to speak, and therefore approachable for validation of findings. The quality of the sketchy notes I took were therefore of less importance than they may have been with other study groups. They did, however, usefully serve as memory bookmarks, allowing enough de-tail to draw me back into the atmosphere of the events, and contained some preliminary thoughts on behaviours:

Tuesday 22nd January 2008 – Evening storytelling

The evening storytelling (student's first recent exposure to storytelling) went better than I could have hoped. Drouthy's downstairs was nice, lit with candles everywhere and a soft light. They turned the music off and the room was a good size. Quite narrow and long, so you could divide it off either way if you wanted. It had a mix of leather sofas and armchairs and stools with low coffee tables...[List of students, staff, teller names.]

...The atmosphere was great, really relaxed and friendly. Jackie just left me to it, so I started by asking everyone to form a bit more of a circle.

Sue took over then and spoke a bit of background about her life...and the culture of travellers in Scotland. Then she told a little anecdote about when she was at school and had to write a fantastic story about something in the sea – her mother told her about the octopus with 8 testicles, which she duly wrote about. Of course, this got everyone laughing and broke the last bit of ice.

Thursday 28th February 2008 – Gaming Workshop

So Jean came in for a day to run a gaming workshop for the IMD students. She started off by explaining a bit about what she does and asked the students some questions about the kinds of storytelling they'd been doing...

There were 9 laptops but in fact only 7 of them were used as they chose to stay in groups of 3 & 2 rather than split individually. I guess this is symptomatic of their experience of always being in groups. Safety in numbers?!

Friday 2nd May 2008 – Timeless Tales

...One of my enduring images of the night is of Sandra sitting on the floor at Callum's TV, straining to hear what was being said! She looked like a 6-year old girl, so excited by every-thing around her!

[All names changed]

I captured some conversations between tellers at network meetings and discussion sessions through written notes. (These discussions served as another means of validating my understanding of storytelling culture.)

Network Day – 2009 Scottish International Storytelling Festival
Sunday 1November

Alice – selling storytelling – Stubborn connection to reality.
'I sell unapologetically. What is the reality? Globalisation. People fighting to have identity and nationhood represented.'
Fighting against silver screen.
Selling idea about how people can come together.

Jack – 'Importance for me is the msg. I have to sell me. Need to keep ego in control. In reality as a performer, I need that moment for myself to get downsized as well. Need to convert. I'm not in charge, something else is in charge.' [Jack is a performing musician as well as storyteller]

Tim – 'I think the essence of storytelling comes down to how it was used originally.' E.g. warnings. But community and sharing – 'lot of stories reflect this.' Bkgd poor farming, community sharing. 'Think in future this will become msg in future.'

[All names changed]

As Ellis & Bochner note, 'the truth is that we can never capture experience.' Refer-ring to field notes they assert that the notes are only 'one selective

story about what happened written from a particular point of view for a particular purpose.' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 750)

Apart from these written journal notes and impressions of storytelling events, I kept a note of my own progress as a storyteller, documenting how I felt after telling stories at clubs, and the training workshops I attended.

In-depth interviews (ranging from one to two hours long) were held with fourteen storytellers from different parts of the storytelling community in Scotland. These were videotaped and audio-recorded. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed in full, coded by the author using an open coding system, using HyperResearch to collate and organise data (see Appendix B for sample transcripts and codes). The coding and analysis procedure followed Rubin's approach of *Responsive Interviewing* (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), loosely following grounded theory, allowing the data to naturally generate themes, concepts and their relationships from the coded data.

The decision was taken to code the data with only one researcher (namely me, the author) rather than try and triangulate and verify the validity of codes and their in-stances. This was partly because, as an insider, my coding would be influenced by my understandings and impressions gleaned from the storytelling group as a whole. Findings from the data were checked by members of the community (i.e. storytellers) at various stages, through discussions at meetings and emails. Valerie Janesick explains this need for the researcher to interpret their own data;

> The role of the qualitative researcher, like that of the dancer or the choreographer, demands a presence, an attention to detail, and a powerful use of the researcher's own mind and body in analysis and interpretation of the data. No one can dance your dance, so to speak no one can choreography your dance but you. On one can interpret your data but you.
>
> (2000, p. 389)

A key component of my contribution to Blether Tay-gither storytelling evenings was in the form of setting up discussions. Blether is in part a support club, fostering the practice of storytelling as well as providing a platform for stories. I sometimes put my name in the hat, but instead of

offering a tale, I threw out a question or two about the nature of storytelling. These discussions added to the sense that Blether was a peer group. As indicated above, my writing up of these debates would be soon after the event, trying to capture the gist of the argument.

3.3 Becoming a Gatekeeper

Ethnography exists on the premise that there is a willing culture prepared to let you observe and study them 'in the wild'. Yet even once such a culture has been found, gaining open access to it may not be easy, and so identifying and liaising with gate-keepers is crucial. Gatekeepers are 'those individuals that have the power to grant access to the field, such as gang leaders, tribal chiefs and heads of organizations and bureaucracies like headteachers and police chiefs.' (Brewer, 2000, p. 83) Generally more than one gatekeeper exists and subtle power wars can ensue between them (and po-tentially against the researcher).

In this study on storytelling in Scotland I effectively became my own gatekeeper. Being instrumental in starting the group and continuing in a pivotal role not only enabled direct access to tellers in Blether Tay-gither but also afforded a degree of credibility when contacting storytellers out with the Dundee club. The level of this access was granted over time and as it was not purely motivated by self-interest it had a high success rate. Although storytellers are naturally gregarious, the role I created for myself (as both secretary and treasurer of the group) allowed a deeper immersion into both the Dundee group and the wider storytelling scene.

My role in the group was not only as an active member but balanced observing interactions with constructing and recruiting the group. Duties performed as part of this role included creating and maintaining a group website, promotional flyers, regularly emailing and updating group members as well as organising a steering group to lead the overall direction of the club. As the initial point of contact for new members and local organisations wanting to collaborate with the group, I was in many ways the gatekeeper in terms of holding access to local storytellers. This role meant that I could comfortably assume a 'real' position in the group other than 'researcher' or 'critic' yet still retain my novice status in terms of storytelling.

There were not therefore any real difficulties encountered on integration into the group as I was in fact facilitating it, so from the outset I was able to adopt a role as an insider (albeit as an organiser and listener rather than a storyteller). This worked well in the context of the larger storytelling scene, a growing movement in Scotland in terms of the club scene and platform telling. As most of the core group members were storytellers living in the nearby areas there was a good mix of experience amongst the group, ranging from novice tellers to very knowledgeable.

Regarding ethical considerations to the research and in particular, the 'grow a group' approach, it is helpful to note Hammersley's words on informed consent and overt ethnography;

> …Furthermore, even when operating in an overt manner, ethnographers rarely tell all the people they are studying everything about the research. There are various reasons for this. One is that, at the initial point of negotiating access, the ethnographer her- or himself of-ten does not know the course the work will take, certainly not in any detail.
>
> (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 265)

That is, ethics in ethnographic research can be a complex issue at the best of times. From the inception of Blether Tay-gither I made it clear that I was a PhD researcher investigating oral culture in the UK. My hope in getting involved with Blether was that a suitable study group might emerge, and in this my expectations were surpassed. In line with the quote above, at the outset I was not sure what course the research would take. Personal journal extracts and field notes taken after storytelling events initially concentrated on my storytelling journey as both listener and teller. Discussions I opened up at monthly events (instead of offering a story) were always prefaced by a description of my status as a researcher and my research topic, followed by a call for the members to help clarify my understanding of the storytelling concepts I was struggling with at that point. Finally, the completed written thesis was subject to member checking (see chapter 3.4).

It has been suggested that ethnographers can create their own communities by the people they study, creating links between them to form virtual communities. For example;

> The "street corner society" studied by Whyte (1955), or Liebow (1967), or Hannerz (1969) became a "society" only because an eth-nographer chose to treat that "nexus of interaction" as a site.
>
> (Angrosino and Pérez, 2000, p. 682)

Yet in this instance, the storytelling club can genuinely be said to form a community in its own right, largely because the infrastructure to support it was already in place in the form of the Scottish Storytelling Forum and Centre and due to the dedication of core group members.

Much storytelling research has been conducted by existing group members (Haggarty, 1996, Ryan, 2006, Smith, 2001, Wilson, 2006), i.e. from an insider's view and so a type of native ethnography. Such research generally has aspects of self-reflection on storytelling practice, for example Forest (2007), and Heywood (2004).

Angrosoino and Pérez (2000) describe Adler and Adler's categorisation of ethnographic roles in terms of membership, ranging from 'peripheral-member researchers', 'active member researchers' and 'complete-member researchers'. 'Active-member researchers' are:

> …those who become involved with the central activities of the group, sometimes even assuming responsibilities that advance the group; they do not, however, necessarily fully commit themselves to members' values and goals. (p.677)

Whereas 'complete-member researchers' are defined as:

> …those who study settings in which they are already members or with which they become fully affiliated in the course of research. Even though practitioners in this category celebrate the "subjectively lived experience," they still strive to use their membership "so as not to alter the flow of interaction naturally". (p.677)

The type of participant observation conducted in this study is certainly reminiscent of 'complete-member' research. Aware of traditional ethnocentric tendencies of anthropology and social science, scholars are acknowledging the need for study group rapport and of viewing informants

not as 'subjects' but as collaborators, to open a dialogue (Angrosino and Pérez, 2000, p. 675). This conceptual approach offers data checking and validity of researchers' perceptions about the community by members, whilst encouraging self-reflexivity on the part of the members about their own roles in the community. It is a similar approach to that of participatory design, viewing users of products as co-designers and co-creators (see chapter 12). This approach was easy to adopt as group members were already self-reflecting storytelling practitioners. The Dundee club encourages this reflection and the range of tellers enhances it, as all of the tellers, especially those who arrived at storytelling relatively recently, have a conscious awareness of the storytelling form and personal motives and journeys into the world of Story.

Whilst bounded and defined by oral communication, the storytelling community is a highly literate group and many tellers publish their own books, whether they are commentaries on the nature of storytelling (Smith, 2001, Wilson, 2006), autobiographies (Smith, 2002, Stewart, 2006), novels (Smith, 2006) or collections of stories (Robertson, 2009).

Thus it was that the research model adopted was a combination of observation and participation, drawing on principles from ethnography, participatory design and con-textual inquiry (see chapter 12). Contextual inquiry is another example of a user-centred technology design process where the model is that of master user and apprentice researcher rather than expert and novice. Similar to ethnography, contextual inquiry takes place in context, that is the place of work, or place of interaction with technology.

3.4 Navigating the Crystal Maze: Validity, Authenticity and Reliability

Participant observation has been much discussed and debated in sociology and anthropology literature in terms of validity. In one sense it is always valid and meaningful as Wolcott ascertains:

> Clearly, our "I was there" approach to research positions us well in terms of the potential truth value or warranted assertability of our reports.
>
> (Wolcott, 1995, p. 169)

'Repeatability' of results is not possible in such qualitative research. Decisions are made on the material collected, what to prioritise and how to code and analyse it. Validity is displayed through the written work, and writing styles serve important roles in this. Conventionally, it is the impassive third person which gives an air of authority, but more recently personal and impressionistic accounts have become more popular (see the next section, *Alternative Ethnographies*). Van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* (1988) provides an overview of the variety of writing styles and their relative merits yet near the end he readily admits the difficulties in maintaining validity and research 'truth':

> I have endeavored to show that there is no sovereign method for establishing fieldwork truths. It is murky out there and in here…In complex settings, fieldwork, while a vitally important and core activity, is not likely on its own to provide a particularly balanced representation of a culture without being supplemented by diverse readings, broadened reflection, and (gasp) other research techniques. (pp. 138)

Clifford and Marcus (1986) also note the reflective quality of the written word, and encompass the notion that the real work of ethnography is making sense after the fieldwork:

> Words and deeds are transient (and authentic), writing endures (as supplementarity and artifice). The text embalms the event as it extends its 'meaning.' (p. 116)

Every written and interpreted event as expressed through ethnography is subject to the researchers' interpretations and perceptions of the group under observation. Ellis (2004, p. 124) claims that validity in autoethnographic work should be measured by reader reactions as well as informants and researchers, 'validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is life-like, believable, and possible.'

One method to reduce inaccuracies is through 'member checking', by working with group members to verify and validate accounts of events. Hammersley (1995) explains:

> The value of respondent validation lies in the fact that the participants involved in the events documented in the data may have access to additional knowledge of the context – of other relevant events, of temporal framework, of others' ulterior motives, for example – that is not available to the ethnographer.
>
> (p.228)

Alternatively, triangulation can be employed, using a range of methods to validate each other and more solidly define research findings.

Cho and Trent (2006) categorise validity in qualitative research into transactional and transformational approaches. Transactional validity 'assumes that qualitative research can be more credible as long as certain techniques, methods, and/or strategies are employed during the conduct of the inquiry.' (Cho and Trent, 2006, p. 322) This is the approach that has been discussed so far and includes placing importance on group members to validate findings and data triangulation. As Cho and Trent state, 'validity of text/account is of primary importance', both in terms of validation with members and with intended audience.

Transformational validation on the other hand, is concerned with self-reflexivity of researchers and an awareness of the interpretative nature of qualitative research. That is:

> …that meanings are social constructions and multiple perspectives on a topic yield multiple meanings. Therefore, the question of validity in itself is convergent with the way the researcher self-reflects, both explicitly and implicitly, upon the multiple dimensions in which the inquiry is conducted. (p. 324)

Similarly, they cite Richardson's crystallisation theory (Richardson, 2000) which ex-tends triangulation and the notion that there is a fixed, apparent truth which research strives for. Richardson notes that all 'truths' are viewed through cultural lens and biases, such that there is no one truth, but likens the experience to viewing a crystal, each angle and reflection is different (see also Janesick, 2000, p. 391).

In the storytelling study for this thesis, a variety of data gathering techniques were used both for tellers, and students exposed to the world of

storytelling. Whilst the idea behind crystallisation was lauded and considered, practicality meant that an extensively multifaceted approach was unfeasible, although the notion that there is no single truth is noted. The participant observation settings and roles were varied however, ranging from myself acting as group leader, driving the storytelling group forward, to a complete observer, noting discussions between tellers. The writing approach adopted in the thesis is also varied, personal journal entries nestle between traditional academic writing, which in turn is interspersed with co-constructed descriptive storytelling experiences. This range was chosen to reflect the nature of storytelling and my personal experience and the shifting perspectives between the digital and story worlds—different glimpses through the crystal if you will.

In terms of research within the storytelling group, member validation was used by presenting research findings and holding informal discussions with tellers. Additionally, email was used to solicit feedback on researcher perceptions of storytelling and draft thesis segments.

Although the application of these methods strive to reduce misinterpretation on my part, all qualitative research is at least partly subjective, drawing on and impacted by researcher biases. By acknowledging this through personal reflections my bias becomes transparent, and thereby truthful. Yet it remains also true that all texts, once frozen in print, are subject to reinterpretation by both author and reader alike.

3.5 Alternative Ethnographies

> *Where is the depth? Oh, where is the feeling? Where am I in all of these words?*
>
> (Donna, age 64)

These pleading questions were uttered to me on a windy morning as I sat on a park bench with one of my research participants. Donna was reading a manuscript I had written for a graduate communication course. She had been one of the "subjects" in my study, dutifully filling out a questionnaire and participating in an interview with me at her home…

…"Where is the feeling," she said, looking at me searchingly.

"Well," I responded, "right there on page seventeen!"

> Did I fail to make it clear, I wondered, that 72 percent of the women in my study felt their fathers underestimated their achievements (Miller 1986)? But the feeling of those women is not reflected in the percentage. Perhaps I should have reported that 72 percent of the women in my study felt hurt and undervalued by their fathers. Even then, the feeling words "hurt" and "under-valued" seemed inadequate to express the sense of loss, confusion, or anger that women like Donna conveyed to me in their interviews.
>
> "I know that I'm a subject," Donna went on, "and I know that you are the researcher. But…uhmmm…I really don't get a sense of either one of us in this paper."
>
> She was right: The persons who participated in the study were absent from the report, an unavoidable consequence of the standardized ways of conducting scholarly inquiry.
>
> (Miller, 1998, p. 67)

The extract above presents the problem with traditional academic writing. When talking about people, cultures, or real events, the sense of human emotion is lost – the story is lost. Autoethnography and alternative ethnographies shift away from impersonal, objective texts and move towards personal, reflexive writings. Autoethnography is 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739)

These evocative texts tend to focus on challenging, edgy topics, e.g. abuse, eating disorders, death, abortion, sickness (Ellis, 2004). They aim at provoking a response in the reader, empowering or transforming. Dorothy Allison wants to 'take the reader by the throat, break her heart, and heal it again' (quoted in Ellis, 2004, p. 138) and this sentiment is symptomatic of the intense quality of writing sought by autoethnography;

> I hold out my arms out straight again. When she grabs on, she and I pull her to a standing position. When she winces in pain, I embrace

> her around her middle steadying her for the long journey back to bed, eight feet away. The tubes extending from her chest and abdomen, the bile-bag necklace—all are properly positioned. She shuffles her feet in baby steps, all the while holding onto my out-stretched arms. She looks into my eyes as I walk backwards, to pick up my cues, when to move forward, when to turn. We are intimately connected. We are totally trusting.
>
> Taking care of her feels natural, as though she is my child. The love and concern flowing between us feels like my mom and I are falling in love. The emotionality continues during the four days and nights I stay with her in the hospital. My life is devoted temporarily to her well-being. She knows it and is grateful. I am grateful for the experience. I do not mind that she is dependent on me. I am engrossed by our feeling, by the seemingly mundane but, for the moment, only questions that matter. Are you dizzy? In pain? Comfortable? Do you want to be pulled up in bed? Can't you eat one more bite? Do you need to pee? Have gas? Want water? Prefer to sleep now? As I help with these events, I do not question their meaning, as I so often do about most things in my life.
>
> from Carolyn Ellis' *Maternal Connections* (2004, p.134)

The key to autoethnography is the showing of events rather than telling, 'bring[ing] readers into the scene – tak[ing] them into the details, rather than telling what hap-pened. The meaning is in the details and the response.' (Ellis, 2004, p. 142) So for example,

> 'Dressed in a mid-calf, purple, cotton dress with a matching, raw-knit cardigan casually draped over her shoulders, Laurel enters the room. A large, loaded-down, cloth bag hangs from her shoulder, and she clutches books and papers in both hands. I am struck, as always, by her presence. Appearing calm while rushing, she gracefully takes over the room.'
>
> (Ellis, 2004, p. 170)

The above extract is from Carolyn Ellis' *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography,* a textbook for autoethnography, written

as a novel. The reader is taken, class by class, through a student module. Socratic dialogues led by Carolyn's lecturer character along with a set of students as additional characters (some fictitious, some genuine) cover all the issues and topics surrounding autoethnography. The result is an intensely moving, readable and thought-provoking book.

When the desire is to create emotive texts, the style of writing becomes immediately freed. Alternative, narrative ethnographies include prose, poetry, plays, dramatic performances, and paintings. The following stream of consciousness example comes from Brady's *The Time at Darwin's Reef: Poetic Explorations in Anthropology and History*. This piece of prose in his multilayered book of poetry, prose and paintings is written in two sections, and the start of each is reproduced here:

> *Nanafatu Island, Central Pacific, June 17, 1874*
> THE EQUATION
>
> I.
>
> *'Sit down with us here next to the candles and the lamps this is my sister and her child Nanafou she is older than my son Fetuu but not as good with a spear eat what you see we have plenty on this island life is strong for us entwined like reef to wave mother to child fish to sea…'*
>
> II.
>
> *'Wake up you sack of entrails or I'll thunder your skull as you lay the truth is we killed and ate your bony dog when it was washed ashore in the storm we stole your money and your gun last night while you slept we took your bullets and your little book and buried them at sea and you are next you are such an arrogant fool you know nothing this is not a naked smelly place a sea tide of savage darkness the underbelly of your better life…'*
>
> (Brady, 2003, pp. 44)

Autoethnography attempts to recreate experience, providing an empathetic space with which readers can engage. Alternative ethnographies span a spectrum of styles, from narrative ethnographies, where the Self is less central, 'the researcher's personal experience becom[ing] important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 740) to the autobiographical autoethnographies described above.

Unsurprisingly, autoethnography has sparked debates about its validity, being accused of 'self-indulgence' (Sparkes, 2002), producing fiction and being non-scientific (Denzin, 1997, p. 264). In response, autoethnographers claim that critics are at a loss as to how to judge texts; they should be judged in the same way as other social texts. Sparkes suggested the following criteria as a starting point;

> 'What substantive contribution to our understanding of social life does it make? What is its aesthetic merit, impact, and ability to express complex realities? Does it display reflexivity, authenticity, fidelity, and believability? Is it engaging and evocative? Does it pro-mote dialogue and show potential for social action? Does the account work for the reader and is it useful?'
>
> (Sparkes, 2002, p. 211)

Autoethnography's 'non-scientific' quality opens the texts up to a wider range of audiences (Sparkes, 2002, p. 211). Their accessibility is a direct benefit to interdisciplinary research where argot can frustrate and limit discussion.

The real argument with autoethnography appears to lie with notions of truth. Traditional 'scientific' ethnographic texts claim objectivity as their validity, positing that their account is an unbiased truth. In comparison, autoethnographic texts recognise that 'the observer is not a neutral spectator; truth is always a function of the visual regime that is deployed.' (Denzin, 1997, p. 265)

The inclusion of Self is in many ways more open as researcher presence is acknowledged, the lens through which the research topic is explored more apparent, and researcher bias noted and exploited. Reed-Danahay tells us that autoethnography has, for the most part, 'been assumed to be more "authentic" than straight ethnography. The voice of the insider is assumed to be more true than that of the outsider in much current debate.' (1997, p. 3)

These personal, reflexive writings are not an easy option, the writer is vulnerable, and seen as an easy target for claims of self-indulgence. Sparkes disparages this notion, but warns that, as in all writing, authors 'need to be aware that their writing can become self-indulgent rather than self-know-

ing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, or self-luminous… "Confessionalism has to know when to hold back.'" (2002, p. 214)

Autoethnography and narrative ethnography answer to the charge of being simply 'fiction' by resting the truth on believability of characters and creating atmosphere, instead of placing emphasis on exactly transcribed words and literal accuracy in events (which mirrors Olson's comments on oral culture, see 2.1 *The Amorphous Nature of Oral Cultures*). The close relationship such messy texts have with the participants ensures that misrepresentations do not occur. In this way, believability and 'truth' run parallel with moral ethics (Denzin, 1997), and texts are often co-constructed with participants (not 'subjects' but co-authors). Thus ownership is shared between co-authors.

Ellis and Bochner answer the concern of 'generalizability' by suggesting that the specific can offer reflection on the general,

> Our lives are particular, but they are also typical and generalizable, since we all participate in a limited number of cultures and institutions. We want to convey both in our stories. A story's generalizability is constantly being tested by readers, as they determine if it speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives? Does a work have what Stake calls 'naturalistic generalization,' meaning that it brings 'felt' news from one world to another and provides opportunities for the reader to have vicarious experience of the things told?'
>
> (2000, p. 751)

These multi-voiced autoethnographic texts require reflection and work on the part of the reader, who is drawn in. The overall effect is of a 'coproduction', where 'readers must be prepared to make meaning as they read, put something of their own into the account, and do something with it.' (Sparkes, 2002, p. 220) 'Messy texts', as Denzin calls them, offer no particular interpretation, they 'refuse theoretical closure, and they do not indulge in abstract, analytic theorizing' (1997, p. xvii). The specific is privileged over the abstract.

As we have seen, alternative ethnographies are all about narrative. The primary importance of creating believable, valid narratives to illuminate

context and events by evoking response and engagement from the reader therefore runs parallel with the primary aim of contemporary storytelling. Representing the storytelling world by text is difficult, so much of the interaction is of the moment and based in visual imagination and the atmosphere of the telling. By using an autoethnographic approach a better sense of the experienced world of storytelling can be realised. The issues facing autoethnography (truth, fiction, ownership, interpretation) match the issues storytellers face, as will be explored in Part II. In fact, Karen Scott-Hoy points out that autoethnographic stories themselves have orality;

> Barone & Eisner (1997) suggest that the art of storytelling lies in the writer's ability to create a virtual reality and make use of expressive, contextualized, and vernacular language in the telling of the story to promote empathy. These stories have aesthetic form, allow the presence of ambiguity, "long to be used, as well as analyzed, to be revised, and retold rather than settled and theorized" (Bocher & Ellis 1996), and bear the personal signature of the teller. All these characteristics give the stories orality, and connect the stories to a life-world (Manoa 1995: 3).
>
> (Scott-Hoy, 2002, p. 278)

The writing adopted in this thesis does not claim to be a complete autoethnography. There are indeed autobiographical elements, but they are confined to my storytelling journey. Reed-Danahay claims that 'one of the main characteristics of an autoethnographic perspective is that the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser, and the role can be characterized as that of a dual identity.' (1997, p. 3) This has certainly been the case for me. My writing slides along a continuum, as the lens switches from outsider to insider and back again, from techno junkie to technophobe, and from listener to teller. The writing switches from personal journal entries, to narrative ethnography charting storytelling events, to dialogue-led discussion and interviews, and to 'scientific' impassive writing.

Rob Drew's *Karaoke Nights: An Ethnographic Rhapsody* (2001) successfully walks the line between description, reflection and analysis, and was an inspirational read. In a similar fashion, stories are woven throughout the text, a reflection on the range of data gathering methods used, each

a glimpse through a facet of Richardson's 'crystal' to view a version of the truth.

I am not naïve enough to presume that the reflexive/narrative ethnographic elements in this thesis are 'transformational', nevertheless, it is hoped that the narratives presented serve to paint a realistic, meaningful and honest picture of the storytelling community in Scotland.

3.6 Anonymity

The increased likelihood of informants reviewing ethnographic texts and the corresponding shift towards co-constructing texts inevitably leads to greater consideration of accountability when composing texts. The benefit of participant reviewing can be interpreted as validation and can surely only have a positive bearing on ethnographic writing as a whole, as research groups are more included in the process, sharing ownership of findings.

In a close knit group such as the storytelling community in Scotland where everyone knows each other, there are two main ways to approach documenting the group. The first option is to strip away all distinguishing, recognisable traits of individuals, documenting events as sparsely and clinically as possible. The result is a dry set of texts, which fail to even begin to capture any of the atmosphere and context of the community. Representing an oral culture in the printed word is difficult enough without being able to use descriptive, evocative language.

The second alternative is the use of what Geertz (1973, p. 6) terms 'thick description', explaining not only the events but the context in which they take place. As reflexive autoethnography becomes more recognised and mainstream, the range and scope of experiential writing becomes more apparent, and more common. However, the danger of writing as 'showing rather than telling' (Ellis, 2004) tends to reveal physical characteristics and mannerisms, i.e. anonymity is no longer ensured.

In choosing to adopt a more fluid approach to writing in the construction of this thesis, issues of anonymity become more complex. All of the fourteen storytellers I formally interviewed signed a consent form stating that anonymity would be preserved. However, upon adopting this more descriptive style of writing (which was deemed more practical and indeed

respectful) a newer consent form was completed whereby participants' real names are used throughout the text. All storyteller participants were sent draft copies pertaining to their referenced quotes and characterisations. Only with their explicit consent were these segments used. This not only strengthens my understanding and documentation of the storytelling community, but the real characterisations enable a fuller picture of the study group to emerge.

In Part III, a case study is presented using University of Dundee students. Again, the participating students all signed consent forms assuring that anonymity would be preserved. Accordingly, throughout the thesis, all student names have been changed to ensure this is the case. (Proper names were chosen instead of 'student A', 'student B' etc as genuine names provide a better sense of individuality.)

Similarly, in a few cases (e.g. extracts from my preliminary field notes and most journal extracts) names of individuals have been changed. In these instances, all name changes have been made clear after the extracts.

Finally, the last domain in which research was undertaken was on the Internet. This research was less in-depth, and acted mainly as a sounding board and as a means of documenting current thoughts. On all platforms my identity as a researcher was clear. My personal blog posts (updated irregularly) related almost solely to my PhD research and my profile duly reflected this. My Twitter account is similarly sign-posted[1] although the content of tweets fluctuates from the trivial to the academic. In my brief forays into Second Life, my avatar clearly stated that I was a researcher, focusing on storytelling and new media.

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter has examined the underlying rationale behind the empirical research focused on storytelling and storytellers. Unlike traditional ethnographies, typified by prolonged geographical displacement of researchers in exotic settings where published reports are disseminated in academic circles far removed from the original 'subjects', this study of storytelling celebrates the knowledge of local tellers. Using principles such as member checking, validation of researcher perceptions was obtained. The growth of the Dundee storytelling group as it emerged as a support network for

local tellers was mirrored by the growth of my personal understanding of storytelling. The self-reflective nature the local tellers hold towards their own practices (noted by Hey-wood, 2004) aided the process towards understanding the culture of storytelling. Crucially, this was in many respects a group effort and discovery, only possible through the willingness and help of storytellers in a cooperative dialogue rather than as mere re-search 'subjects'.

A striking parallel could be made with the debate on authority, truth and ownership of storytelling (chapter 8), and validity in ethnography. They are largely the same problem, namely that of making stories unique to the teller or author, believable (i.e. consistent) and authentic. Every ethnography has a personal interpretation imprinted in it, even when written in the impassive and 'authoritative' third person. Alternative forms take stock of this by adopting a more personal style of prose. Self is also present to varying degrees throughout this thesis; as Richardson argues, Self is always present, writing is 'always partial, local, and situational.' (2000, p. 930)

Notes

1. My Twitter account (@deb_max) profile reads: PhD student (in painful writing up phase now), storytelling, new media, narrative. (http://twitter.com/deb_max) It also links to my website, which details my university affiliation. (Accessed 3 March 2010.)

Part II:
The
Stories


'Those nostrils wud be perfect for defrosting
those feet', thought Willie

'Storytelling' is used to describe all kinds of narrative, from films to plays and photography, novels to architecture, intelligence analysis (Eccles et al., 2008) and even the design process of computer systems. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis it is necessary to describe exactly what 'storytelling' actually is, what it means to be a storyteller, and then place this in the local context of storytelling in Scotland.

As discussed in Part I, the view of storytelling adopted here is not concerned with plot or structural narrative intricacies, it is a medium, grounded in culture—defined by its human connections. For this reason, the following chapters include stories from tellers which illustrate this culture. Chapter 4 covers the background of storytellers whilst chapter 5 examines their motivations and the range of work they do.

Chapter 6 deals with the transformational power of storytelling, focussing largely on the teller's perspective. The live act of telling—the key characteristic of storytelling—is examined in chapter 7, with particular emphasis on the role of mind-pictures (or visual imagination) and the interconnected relationship between listener, teller and story.

After using specific examples of storytelling in Blether Tay-Gither (the Dundee storytelling group which forms the basis of the empirical work) in the preceding chapters, chapter 8 takes a look at the more formalised, wider issues of storytelling in Scotland and the UK, reflecting on issues of ownership and authenticity—both issues of debate in new media as well.

Drawing on all the evidence presented so far, chapter 9 builds up a picture of storytelling, suggesting and then refining a set of attributes, which will subsequently be applied to the domain of new media in Parts III & IV.

Lastly, chapter 10 discusses the role of technology in storytellers' lives and examines their attitudes towards it.

Chapter 4
What is Storytelling?

> A truly oral traditional [storytelling] relationship is based on the idea of community.
>
> (Sobol, 1999, p. 38)

STORYTELLING is the sharing of stories 'eye to eye, mind to mind, and heart to heart' (an oft quoted Travellers saying). The stories, often folktales, are told orally, without reading or rote learning from a script and generally without the use of props, though this depends on the style of the teller. Gatherings may be in the form of a performance, with only one storyteller (for example at the Netherbow theatre at the Scottish Storytelling Centre), but more often it is a traditional ceilidh, where everyone shares a story, song or joke (for example in storytelling clubs). The atmosphere is invariably informal, and situated somewhere conducive to 'blethering' or chat. An comfortable place which is relatively quiet is ideal, although I have seen and heard storytellers wage successful wars against the sounds of industrial vacuum cleaners and coffee machines. In general, there is no physical stage or platform, a fact which encourages the intimate, sharing atmosphere.

The following section describes a typical storytelling evening at Blether Tay-gither (the Dundee-based storytelling group which forms the core study for this thesis). As this *Journey into the Land of Stories* shows, storytelling is very much a group activity, passed on orally. The background of storytellers reflects this and as we shall see, many of them cite family members as key influences, recalling inspirational parents, grannies and aunties who told them magical tales when they were young. Understanding this background is helpful in unpicking the motivations of tellers—what drives

them to be storytellers? Storytelling in Scotland is very much applied, in schools, social work, and language acquisition. The shape of storytelling today then is in fact influenced by family and Scottish cultural heritage (where traveller tradition and ceilidh culture has had a huge impact on the resurgence of contemporary storytelling).

A Journey into the Land of Stories

WHAT follows is an impressionistic account of tale tellers in action in the context of a typical Blether Tay-gither monthly storytelling session. The stories told and tellers present all happened, but are drawn from a series of evenings, and were chosen for inclusion in this account to reflect the range of stories and tellers present in the group. The account reproduced below was created from fieldnotes and fleshed out from memory. As with all references to real individuals in this thesis, the account was subject to member checking by all the individuals cited.

As the applause and post-story chat dies down, the soft woollen hat is passed round the circle once again and the next name is duly pulled out. Owen. He smiles and shifts in his chair slightly.

An original member of Blether Tay-gither, Owen is unusual in that he is both young (early thirties) and male. Whilst the gender split in the wider storytelling community seems quite even, Blether is predominantly female, and the age range, with a few exceptions, tends to be forties and upwards.

Owen entered the storytelling world via the arts, through sculpture and wood-carving and his dreadlocks and full beard hints at his ecological, environmental slant towards storytelling.

Leaning forward, he explains, 'The story I was going to tell tonight I've decided I'm not going to tell, because after that last story we heard it seems more fitting to tell a different one. So, I'll tell the one I was going to tell tonight another time. But the story I am going to tell was told to me by Duncan Williamson. And I've told it in quite a few places now, but never at Blether.'

He pauses and the only sound in the brightly lit room is the hiss and bub-

ble from the large urn in the corner. Outside the sky is turning dark, the outline of the trees fading into the gloom, but inside, the single-roomed wooden building retains its warm orangey glow. Faces are turned towards Owen, waiting expectantly.

Owen looks round the circle and begins.

'This is a story about a king.

'Now this king loved to get presents.

'And one day a stranger comes to the castle and, without a word, presents the king with a beautifully carved wooden box before he disappears out of the castle again.

'The king opens the box and inside is a gleaming bowl.

'As he lifts the bowl out of the box he notices an inscription inside it. The writing's in Latin but being a king he can read it.

"Give this to the one whom you love the most.'"

His hands trace out the shape of the carved box and inscribed bowl as he speaks. His voice is quiet yet both distinct and distinctive, driving an understated style of telling which suits the traditional tale.

At the close of the story he pauses for a few seconds waiting for the laughter to subside, and smiles, inclining his head slightly, indicating the end.

Everyone stirs, clapping Owen and his story, and a short discussion starts, querying different versions of the story and whether they knew it already. Senga offers the original Latin words for the bowl's inscription which Owen writes down for future tellings.

As the chat subsides, Owen shakes the hat and draws out another name. It is a small group, about twelve people at the club tonight, but not everyone has their name in the hat. Numbers vary each month, depending on the venue and individual commitments. Tonight it is held in the local Botanic Gardens, part of the University. Potential venues are limited by what the group can afford; only a free venue will suffice. At first the group had so few people willing to tell that more experienced storytellers told more than one story, but now the sessions last until the hat is empty, often running up to an hour over than the advertised two hour slot.

Owen unfolds the piece of paper and announces, 'Robbie.' Everyone smiles and looks at Robbie, sitting two seats away from Owen.

Robbie, another original member of the group, reaches into a bag beside

her and pulls out a long stick adorned with multicoloured ribbons, beads and tufts of felt. Several of the group lean forward, 'oohing' and 'aahing' appreciatively.

A relatively small woman in her late forties with short spiky hair and the kind of face that's always ready to break into a friendly smile, Robbie is an accredited story-teller with the Scottish Storytelling Forum. She works with pre-school age children and their parents and carers, singing with babies and tots. Most of her work is in local libraries.

'Now this,' she says, swaying a little from side to side in her seat, 'is a story stick.' She pauses for effect and smiles round the group.

'I made this at a workshop in Edinburgh for a story called "Walter's Wand" and I thought I'd bring it in to let everyone see it, 'cos I've talked about it before so I thought, well, I might as well just bring it in!' Robbie laughs.

'So what happens is, you have this stick, and you tie things onto it, bits of ribbon or, you know, whatever, and they tell the story, it acts as an aide-memoiré,' she says.

'And so, Robbie, do you take the stick with you when you tell in schools? Do you actually use it when telling?' Sylvia asks interestedly, leaning forward.

'Well, this is it, you can do. I chose Walter's Wand because I thought that this could be his actual wand and so I do take it with me and show the children each bit. Also, you can wave it as a wand. However, I've got another one.' Robbie reaches into her bag again and pulls out another two storysticks.

'Now, this was the story of the Nightingale and when Senga was mentoring me she asked me to learn this story. No matter how hard I tried I couldn't seem to remember it, I kept forgetting bits and getting mixed up. So I thought, I know! I'll make a storystick for it. And this was the first one I made and I told the story to Senga using the stick.' Robbie waves the stick in the air. It is covered with so many decorations the stick itself is barely visible.

'And once I'd told the Nightingale to Senga, she suggested that I didn't need all of the detail and I could cut some bits out, and so I made a new story stick and this is it.' Robbie holds up the other stick, which is similar to the one in her right hand but much simpler; a visible artefact of the

story's structure and patterning.

'Well, it was just that you don't need to say everything. That's the beauty of storytelling,' Senga explains, looking round the group.

'Exactly, well put Senga. So, anyway, I thought I'd tell you the story of Walter's Wand with my magic wand.' Everyone turns again towards Robbie.

'Now, this is a story about a wee boy who goes to the library with his mum.' As Robbie tells the story about the little boy who uses his pretend wand to make characters from books come alive she uses the stick as a wand, asking for a magic word from the group of listeners. Alakazam is proffered and everyone waves their wand arm as instructed shouting 'Alakazam!'

As the story progresses, Robbie moves along the wand, using it as an open visual of how far through the story we are. She points to a tuft of orange and black felt and thread.

'Now what do you think that could be?'

'Tigers!' shouts someone.

'That's right, very good! Walter waves his wand and shouts "Alakazam!" And all of a sudden, these big, orange and black stripy tigers jump out of the book and go racing towards the librarian. But our librarian, she's made of sterner stuff.' Robbie's clear voice rings out around the room.

At parts of the story, Robbie breaks out of telling to describe the context and how she gets children to interact and think about things.

'And now this is the sea and I get them to tell me creatures that live in the sea. And so it lets them, you know, show off a wee bit and tell me what they know.'

Walter's library is finally returned to its original state and the story draws to a close. An animated discussion starts up about the powerful potential of storysticks, both for learning stories and as a visual aid in retellings. Owen describes a session where he successfully combined a storywalk and storystick creation with children to enable them to retell the story later.

Robbie reaches for the woollen hat and pulls the next name out of the hat, Russell. Russell laughs, bracingly loud, and pushes his glasses up towards his nose.

'Well, erm, folks, thanks for er, letting me come along tonight. What I plan to do is get erm, you guys to do all the work today,' he laughs again.

'And er, I'm just going to er, facilitate it as it were. However, I think it might be best if we stop for a wee break and have a coffee before we start, if that's ok. That's what tends to happen, is it? You do stop for a wee break about the middle?'

Everyone nods and agrees and we all stand up, making their way towards the still bubbling urn. Russell stands up too and starts chatting with Senga. Average height, mid-forties with short, thinning hair, Russell is a key member in the Scottish Storytelling Forum. He was instrumental in supporting Blether Tay-gither in the early stages and even hosted the first meeting. He still maintains an active interest in the group and is attending tonight as a guest to demonstrate storymaking skills. Russell is keenly interested in community building and appreciative inquiry, applying these techniques in his work as a church minister in Edinburgh. His open, friendly manner suggests an approachability and enthusiasm a world away from the dour, stern Presbyterianism stereotype parodied by Ricky Fulton as Reverend I.M. Jolly. Like Robbie, Russell is an accredited storyteller and his experience includes using storytelling in prisons to enable inmates to share and develop their own stories.

Once everyone is back in their chairs again, a feat which requires some chiding on my part, Russell puts his cup of coffee on the floor and begins.

'Right folks, what we're going to do tonight is make our own story, so what we need first is a setting for our story, what do you think? What shall we have? Just shout out any ideas.'

At first there is a little pause, then someone suggests a castle and the story has begun.

'Fantastic, right. So-so-so we've got this old medieval castle, let's make it the great banqueting hall. Just take a moment to visualise that in your mind, think of the size of it, the expanse of space, and furniture, or-or-or lack of it, in the hall.' Russell stops and gives everyone time to think of the castle.

'So, this great castle, it's amazing but there's just one problem, there's no people, there's no characters inside it. So, so we need to change that. I want everyone to think of a character that's going to come into this hall. Can be anything, doesn't need to be human, ok? And we'll just take a wee minute to think about this character and then we're going to go round the room and tell everyone what character we're bringing to the castle. And I want

you to give me a name and a description of your character and how they get into the castle, whether they walk or run or fly or-or-or whatever.' Russell talks animatedly, with a strong Scottish accent readily punctuated by his trade-mark laugh.

One by one, round the circle, characters are named and described, a fairy on stilts, a fishwife and a small boy amongst others, each with their own unique potential for stories. Russell recaps each character as we go round the circle, so that by the end everyone still remembers all of them.

Russell drives the plot next, asking what stories could come out of these characters, how could they interact with each other and what they might be doing there. A couple of suggestions are given around a few of the characters and slowly an overall story begins to emerge. Russell recounts the story so far at regular points until the story is complete. By the end of the session, everyone in the group has spoken and given ideas for the story. Russell wraps up the storymaking and everyone, relaxed and smiling, waits as he rummages in the hat for the next name.

'Ooh, not too many names left in here now! Only one in fact! Who do we have here? Ah, let me just unfold—it's Senga!'

Senga opens her eyes wide in mock surprise and presses her hands together.

'Well,' she says, emphasising every word, 'Nasrudin went to the bathhouse.' Senga looks round the group before continuing.

'Now, as you all know, Nasrudin wasn't the best dressed man you'd ever seen. So when he turned up at the bathhouse and now, he wasnae wearing his best clothes, he wasnae wearing his good clothes, and he was wasnae even wearing his old claes. Oh no. He was wearing the filthiest, oldest, most tatty clothes he had. And the attendants at the bathhouse; well you can just imagine what they thought. Poohee!' Senga holds her nose at the imagined smell, telling the story swiftly with her voice and gestures.

One of the older members of Blether and an accredited teller, Senga is held in high regard by other tellers and often asked for storytelling sources or references. A former teacher, Senga not only tells in schools but runs training sessions for teachers. Acutely aware of story patterning and rhythm and the power of language and voice, Senga tells a variety of stories from around the globe. However she is also very fond of telling stories in her 'mither tongue', Scots and has in the past recounted how her

language was stolen from her at school, forced to learn and use substitute English words.

Senga is the epitome of a granny, right down to the knitting she always carries with her, yet this conceals her ability for sharp storytelling. Her eyes can flash and hold you with a glance, and her voice is a tool which can become surprisingly sonorous when the story calls for it.

The tale of Nasrudin, the wise fool, is ending.

"'Ah," said Nasrudin, "but the penny tip was for last time, and the silver coin was for this time!'" Senga finishes her story to laughter and clapping.

The time is late now, well after the nine o'clock supposed end of the meeting. There are no more names in the hat, the storytelling session is concluded and slowly everyone begins to clear up and leave the room. This in itself takes at least twenty minutes as people chat about the stories told and their current storytelling interests. Finally, the lights are turned off and the door of the wooden hut closed. Snatches of chatter and laughter catch in the branches of trees as everyone wanders down the garden path towards the car park.

Wednesday 12th August 2009

We had our steering group meeting yesterday. It was all a bit last minute as it turned out that several folk couldn't make our originally planned date. But in the end five out of the seven turned up at Rachel's house in Cupar. That's the first time we've met there, it's actually quite handy as it's in the middle of where we all live. And the food was better than our normal haunt of the Queens' Hotel bar! Rachel made cheese scones and very chocolately cookies. Mmmm. But back to the meeting. We had a quick review of all we've achieved over the past few months. It was unanimously agreed that the Big Tent festival was a huge success for us, over 170 people (mainly children) sat in for story sessions over the weekend. The fact that we had the yurt as a venue, decorated with rugs, cushions and wall hangings made all the difference. It's not the first time I've noticed how important the physical space can be.

We all wore our brand new 'Blether Tay-gither' polo-shirts for the first time with 'Storyteller' emblazoned on the front. Tom did a fantastic job

designing the logo. It took much longer than I anticipated to get it finished, trying to get everyone to agree on a design was challenging! But the final product is great. We were a veritable rainbow of tellers – red, orange, yellow, green, light blue, navy blue and purple. (The closest we could get to ROYGBIV.) Luckily our budget ran to printing some postcards too, which looked pretty great.

We discussed some of our future events and it seems like we have a busy few months ahead. One of the most exciting is our group venture onboard the Unicorn Frigate. We will be part of the local Tay Roots festival, spending an evening in the Captain's Cabin telling nautical tales. We are also going to be part of Fresher's Fair at the university, running a workshop and story sharing session. I find it interesting and incredibly positive that we are starting to do more events as a group. They are largely unpaid events, although we secured funding from Awards for All for the Big Tent festival. Alice mentioned at the meeting that she has been telling people that they can hire us as a group for events. I think that's a fantastic idea! Alice seems much more confident now, in her telling and in general. It all shows how much we are bonding and being identified with as a group. To think that not long ago I was having to scrabble around each month trying to find a suitable venue. It's much simpler now and allows me to focus on other things. We either use the Rep theatre café area, or failing that the Botanic garden's education centre – it's like a giant summer house.

As ever, the meeting went on longer than I'd anticipated. I guess that's storytellers. But I found it hard to extricate myself. Even after Alice had gone for the bus, I stood at the door frame, hovering but still part of the conversation. Rachel sat in the corner, patiently knitting part of a baby's cardigan that Sue had brought with her for help. Earlier on, we were all looking at Alice's photos of her son's wedding. Eventually I left, still thinking of the possibilities for future events as I drove home, trying to draw our group into the fabric of our local area. Our aim for the next meeting is to draw up a programme of events for 2010. Despite the name of the group (officially it's 'Dundee Storytelling Group' as registered on OSCR) we have been moving around, going to St Andrews and Cupar. Next month we will be in Perth for the first time. So our 'local area' is quite extended.

[Names changed]

4.1 Who are the Storytellers?

When talking about storytellers and asking 'Who is a Storyteller?' or, 'What makes a Storyteller?' it is easy and trite to answer either 'everyone' or, 'anyone who is on the Scottish Storytelling Directory'. Whilst both have elements of truth, the latter answer seeks to professionalise the art whilst the former opens it to the inclusion of everyday conversation. For the purposes of my research, I have assumed that a 'Storyteller' is someone who tells stories in various settings in a role of storyteller, which may or may not be paid work. In the main, this does mean that most of these storytellers are part of the national storytelling directory in Scotland.

4.2 There's a storyteller standing behind you

There is a saying that when you tell a story those who have told it before, the story ancestors so to speak, are standing just behind your shoulder. It always reminds me of the 'turtles all the way down', a long, potentially infinite line of people silently observing your rendition of a story. The notion of previous tellers watching you demands a sense of gravitas and respect for both the stories and the practice, and is typical of the Scottish storytelling community ethos. It is said that the only time a story can truly belong to or be owned by an individual is in the telling (Yashinsky, 2004). Yet even that statement is contentious, for it actually belongs to the grouping of listeners and teller as a whole, bound to that instant in time.

With this connection to the past in mind, and Bruner's (2002) nod to the need for life stories to make sense of our personal past, it is not surprising that storytellers have rich descriptions of their own journeys into the world of story. The role of family is not to be underestimated. Early familial influences along with more sweeping cultural influences and the discovery of storytelling through other aspects of life, such as work, forms the main strands of storytellers' life stories regarding their practice. These back-grounds temper the style of storytelling in the individual teller and the storytelling community as a whole. This can be seen in some of the differences between storytelling in the UK and North America, where performance-led storytelling is more prominent compared to the more applied nature of storytelling in Scotland (Sobol, 1999).

Understanding the background of storytellers is essential as it reveals motivations and aspirations in their art, positioning storytelling as an artefact of relevance in to-day's society and crucially, revealing contemporary storytelling as a living entity rather than a relic of tradition.

4.3 'It's to do with my family': Family Influences

Sylvia is a small woman, brimming full of enthusiasm and excitement. When she tells a story I can imagine her when she was a child, she seems to see and think in such a free imaginative way. Her style of storytelling makes much use of the physical environment and frequently invokes the listener's response. She often talks socially about her family, in particular her mother and her sons (now both grown-up but still drawing on their mother's creativity) and when I ask her how she started on the path of puppetry and storytelling she cites her family as her first influence.

Sylvia looks into the distance, pressing her finger tips together. 'It's to do with my family. Because they were,' she says, smiling, 'and are such an odd bunch and so expressive, and so mad—stories were just pouring out of everybody.'

She qualifies, speaking quickly, 'But it's not the kind of stories you sit down and listen to. It's just "nhee nhee nhee nhee nhee" all the time.' She uses her hands as she speaks, making chattering gestures into her ears.

I wonder why she feels the need to justify the type of storytelling her family used. Even within the storytelling community, or perhaps more so, story definitions vary.

Sylvia continues, 'And er, I do believe it's partly my mum's Irish background. They have a sort of way of talking which just goes on and on and it's fun and everything. She was wonderful fun my mum. I think a lot is due to her but also her sister used to stay with us a lot and she regaled us with endless stories about her nursing life, through the war and all the other incredible things that happened to her. I think highly embellished!'

Sylvia laughs at this. Truth and authenticity, in a similar way to research, are complex and emotive topics in storytelling (see chapter 8).

'And she used to also have us on the edge of our seats. There were four of

us in the family, the boys included, while she told us her versions of Oliver twist and things like that. And, and, she got so caught up in them that it must have had a huge influence on us all. 'Cause you always feel she was carried away with it.'

As she speaks it strikes me that there are parallels between Sylvia's own expressive brand of storytelling and that of her aunt's. When Sylvia tells a story or uses puppets you can see how much fun and enjoyment she takes in the process.

'And then sadly she didn't have children of her own but therefore it was great that she passed on what she did. But I do have this other memory of the granny on that side, we never saw her much, but I do remember sitting on this capacious knee and being told stories that she invented—little stories.' A smile plays over her face as she recalls the scenes.

It is obvious that Sylvia's family experiences and interest in storytelling are closely connected. She describes a photograph of a relative, a great aunt or granny, in a wheelchair holding a doll and telling a story with it, while people gathered around her.

When I compare my own family storytelling experiences they seem much quieter. As an only child growing up in England with my parents, away from the rest of the extended family in Glasgow, much of the family storytelling came from my mum. For some reason her anecdotes about family and childhood events seemed to occur on a Sunday afternoon. It even became a family catchphrase, 'Is it Sunday already?' teasing her when she reminisced out with the specified day.

Sylvia takes a sip of coffee. We are sitting outside the arts centre in Dundee. It is a mild autumnal day and we are accompanied by the sounds of children playing round about us and traffic passing on the main road.

Sylvia begins to talk about her mother again. 'Anyway then my mum—very, very playful, unusually so—like a child in some ways, 'cause she would be down on the floor playing with us and getting other children to come in, and play. Ah, she just loved that, and so she's handed on a huge amount of that to us and particularly me. But she was very gregarious and outgoing. I'm quite a shy person probably because the house was so full of people and things and I was the youngest. I find that quite much, you know, for a wee sort of tail ender of the family. It's quite good because then I would hide away and be inventive and get away from all the "nhee nhee nhee" and

noise and music and everything.'

Sylvia as a shy person? I can't quite believe that when she tells me it. She seems so confident and self-assured and very capable of speaking in front of a room full of people. Yet on reflection I begin to understand her a bit better. In conversation she draws people out and ensures that everyone is included. She is always eager to help in developing Blether Tay-gither but only after checking that she is not stepping on anyone's toes. Part of the appeal of working in creative arts for children lies in its peripatetic nature, the ability to flit between schools and clubs. As a naturally shy and quiet person myself, I find myself relating to this notion of time-limited intense bursts of confidence and conversation before heading off to the next place.

Sylvia tells me about her childhood holidays, spent on a remote farm in the Borders; children revelling in the freedom of roaming the hills, lying on the heather gazing into the sky.

'And did you tell stories when you were there?' I ask.

'I was writing stories by that time, yes. Writing actual books, and illustrating them and stapling the pages.' Sylvia explains how the cottage would be filled with company and music and stories but how she shied away from some of the noise.

'It was quite good for me, because as I say, I would find my own world and my mum would always made sure we had friends staying with us. So you'd be filling up the evenings playing snakes and ladders or all these things you'd play. But also sitting round telling stories, in the lamplight or with a candle and then going upstairs.' She sketches out a lamp and candle with her hand.

'Creaky stairs 'cos it was just a cottage, two floors overlooking this valley and creaky stairs with your candle. Every step creaked!' Sylvia leans forward, candle in hand. 'And if you needed to go to the toilet in the night you'd have to creak all the way down again in the darkness.' She stretches out 'darkness' in a semi-spooky voice. 'So you really had to be motivated to go down,' she laughs.

I nod, remembering my own childhood reluctance to leave the safety of my bedroom in the dark.

'And it was low, sloping ceilings and everything creaked and was dark and there was great big cupboards. I don't know what you call those. Are those presses? I don't know.'

Her manner of seeking assurance on words and phrasings in everyday conversation carries over to her storytelling, a way of connecting with the listeners, dissolving the boundary between performer and audience.

'These were farm workers' cottages but my brother said they were filled with bogles and ghosts. So I used to lie at night looking at the doors of these cupboards and there were things under the bed but I used to be so good at telling stories that my sister, I terrified her. And she's the most practical person! So she wouldn't get out of bed in case something grabbed her ankle! So I was at it too.'

We both laugh.

'So she used to use me as a thing to help her fall asleep cos I would just go on with the stories endlessly every evening and she still remembers my voice droning on and on. And then I would say "Are ye awake?"' Sylvia makes a loud snoring noise. 'I would still go on! So you can see how it all started.'

Sylvia's case is not unique. Many of the storytellers I have spoken to (nine out of the fourteen formally interviewed) claim a part of their storytelling lineage from family members. Often this was not in formal storytelling but may have been similar to my own experience, a mother, aunt or granny telling anecdotes of their childhood, 'usually about things that had happened, things that people had been told rather than fairy tales.' (Senga) Sometimes they would be focused round the kitchen table, or at bedtime, turning 'day into night' (Frances), or to while away long car journeys. The main family storyteller in all cases bar one was female. This conforms to the folklore trait of women as tradition bearers and holders, imparting knowledge and stories whilst bringing up the children or working, perhaps spinning cloth (Warner, 1994).

As can be seen from Sylvia's account of family stories, the parallels between early influences and storytelling styles may be profound. Another teller, Lindsey, specialises in spontaneous storytelling, working with the group of listeners to generate characters and a plot on the hoof. Her recollection of stories was centred around her mother, 'a fantastic story maker-upper', and told how her family were simply 'storytellers'. 'We've always told stories, where other families might play music together we've always told stories. You know, it's just always been there.'

Similarly, Michael mirrors his own story style with that of his father, from whom he heard stories when he was just 'days old' thanks to a set of older siblings who clamoured for his father's tales. When Michael began telling stories to his own children he drew on the experience of his father's tales, basing them on the same fictional character his father had used but creating new adventures.

It is possible to look at these distinct parallels between early life and current interests in two ways. One, namely that indeed there is an obvious cause and effect. That these early storytelling experiences were so vivid and enjoyable that they coloured future decisions and, perhaps indirectly, led towards the path of becoming a storyteller. Or two, that these stories, whilst not in essence fictitious, have been elaborated and reinforced through multiple renditions to give meaning and direction to past career and life choices. It is not my intention to offer a definitive answer on this count, but I simply note that, as Bruner (2002) points out, we all construct life stories to make sense of past decisions. Certainly, my glancing foray into the storytelling world has caused me to question my own storytelling background and seek answers for my fascination with stories. As suggested by Smith (2001) and others (Yashinsky, 2004, Sawyer, 1997), perhaps it is simply down to the human need for stories which compels us to hear and tell.

4.4 The Jerry Minger Show: Applied Storytelling

Storytelling may often be called a traditional art but whilst it is obviously steeped in oral history it is fundamentally a living art form. It only truly exists in the telling; any literary representation is at best a poor imitation. Neither can technology, as it is argued in this thesis, fully replicate the experience either. And perhaps 'experience' is the key. The stories themselves (the plot and characters) can be captured in print, but to truly appreciate and understand storytelling you need to be there, absorbing it live. This living art form cannot simply wrap itself in tradition or refuse to acknowledge today's society. Mobile phones ring during stories (I've even heard the storyteller's phone ring) and so they have to be told in a way that relates to current knowledge. If stories are not relevant to contemporary culture then they are either adapted or not told, consigned to dusty tomes in a folklor-

ist library. Nowhere is this need for relevance more apparent than the incredibly diverse and widespread application of storytelling techniques and folktales.

All the tellers I know and interviewed do most of their storytelling in these applied contexts, that is, in education, community building, business or social work. (The term 'applied storytelling' is being used here to include every type of storytelling which is not purely for entertainment's sake, for example storytelling events at the Scottish Storytelling Centre and club nights at Blether Tay-Gither are excluded. With regard to storytelling in schools, tellers are generally asked to tell stories to children around a certain topic or theme, which ties into current class projects, such as 'the sea'. My use of this term is similar to Wilson's definition, *'to mean everything that is not platform storytelling.'* Wilson, 2006, p. 95)

I settle back into the sofa, turning towards Ruth. The video camera is perched on top of a TV and points towards Ruth as she sits at the other end of the sofa. The large, bright room, more than just a summer house, is a haven full of space and peace, perfect for working and relaxing in. As I nibble carrot cake and sip tea, Ruth talks about her work with children and storytelling.

'I think it's like hard to know when you start storytelling isn't it, 'cos once you do for it a while you realise you've probably even been doing it for years, you know, forever kind of thing.' She smiles and runs her hand through her slightly dishevelled wavy hair.

'In social work you know, there's a lot of storytelling involved in that. I qualified in nine¬teen eighty-six and worked a lot with children so had to work, say in a case conference giving a family history orally or going to court and being a witness which is—it's all using the same skills in a way, except you're not trying to be entertaining.' Ruth laughs.

'And then I worked a lot with children who were in care, and did a lot of work with them, trying to build up their life story and sometimes working with children who were very, very quiet or quite shy, depressed you know. So finding ways of bringing out their story has interested me for years but I never used—consciously used—traditional stories as a tool in that.'

'So I suppose when I started telling traditional stories consciously erm,

I would have been—-', Ruth pauses, calculating. 'That would have been about nineteen ninety-nine.'

She describes the Edinburgh-based project for two social workers which marked the start of using folktales in her work.

'There was a project there who were wanting to work with girls who had mothers who had drug or alcohol problems and they felt they didn't really have the experience of working with–with kids in that position. So Carol [name changed] and I started working on this group together, and she said, "I don't know if you'd fancy it but you know, I've been socialising with storytellers and I'm really interested in some of these stories and how, how they might come into my work, so, d'you fancy giving it a go?"'

Some of this is familiar to me. The storytelling community in Scotland is small, everyone knows everyone else. When I mention my research to storytellers I am often bombarded with names of people I should speak to. Ruth and her colleague Carol are two of these, normally mentioned together in the same breath.

'So, we worked with Little Red Riding Hood, even though these girls were Primary Six, you know, ten years old. It really worked well as a vehicle for group work and for them getting to express themselves and work together and you know, us sort of work on the group dynamics.'

I silently note the use of Little Red Riding Hood. It seems to be a very powerful and evocative fairytale, multilayered with many interpretations ascribed to it. Storytellers have told me the 'true' meanings, from sexual warnings to civil war allegory. Many modern versions exist, including Angela Carter's in *The Bloody Chamber* (2007) and Donna Leishman's interactive narrative *Red Riding Hood* (2000).

Intrigued, I ask Ruth about the use of the story. 'How did you do it? Do you mean you told it or did you get them to work on the story?'

Ruth explains, 'We did both. Told it and then got them to, erm, we brought in dressing up clothes and we got them to sort of retell it but dressing up as well—just them let play with it really. I don't think we were too directive from what I remember. Just really let them play around with it.'

I struggle to identify with the experience of the young carers. My own upbringing seems so secure and safe in comparison. I can only imagine the freedom these young carers must have felt in the context of a safe environ-

ment and story.

'And I remember something else they wanted to do was—that was when the Jerry Springer show had just come out, and they wanted to do the Jerry Minger show.' Ruth smiles at this and I do too. It seemed at one point that the television schedule was full of sensationalist Jerry Springer shows and I can easily understand why they would be keen to parody or relate to it.

'They wanted the session to be about drugs, and so they said, "Right, so we've got to have like all—" And they just came up with all these people that would be on a Jerry Springer show. Like, the parent of somebody who's got a drug problem, the child, the baddie drug dealer, the sort of reformed drug user,' she laughs, remembering. 'And each took these characters and it was quite funny. And one of them had to be Jerry Minger and we had to get them a microphone.'

Following this project, part of Ruth's work evolved into schools, helping teachers cope with difficult classes. Ruth and the rest of the team would work alongside the teacher for a term. She recounts a particular class of Primary Five (nine year old) children in Craigmillar in Edinburgh. This relatively deprived area was undergoing demolition and redevelopment so a lot of children were moving into temporary accommodation and there was, she explained, a lot of loss and change happening. So they decided to focus on these themes of loss and change in the project.

'Myself and another project worker who was a teacher went in and started trying to work—Well they'd had a lot of changes of teachers as well and the teacher they now had was quite new to them and she was a newly qualified. And she was just, oh God, they were just climbing the walls, you know. And we started doing some stuff around loss and change and they just, they couldn't cope with it. You know there just wasn't enough safety for them in that class to look at anything scary. So erm, we went back to the team and sort of said, you know, looked through this class list. And I remember there was twenty-four kids in the class and when we went through them name by name there was eighteen that we knew of definitely had, you know, quite severe trauma or loss going on in their families, or their extended families and so we just thought we were really going to have to take a much gentler approach with this class. So we decided to try, I thought I'd try telling them a traditional story. So I told them a traditional story of Duncan Williamson's and they just calmed down completely. It

was amazing. It's the first time I think we'd got them all to sort of sit down and calm down and just look their age 'cos they were all, especially some of the boys, they were really trying to look like wee hard men you know. So it was very moving and very powerful and I just thought, mmm, there's definitely a lot in this.'

Ruth and the project team worked with the class twice a week for two terms, finding different stories to tell each week. She recalls how this process was a very immersive and supportive introduction to storytelling. Her current work includes a lot of training and storytelling, built on her experience with social work training. (In fact, I first met Ruth in the Scottish Storytelling Centre when I was interviewing another teller for my research. Ruth was rummaging around in the cupboards, getting materials for a workshop she was about to run.)

'So I do a lot of training really and I do work, like I was speaking about earlier where it's using the storytelling just as one of the tools to engage with kids and inspire them and get them to work as a group or a class towards some sort of a goal. Or to work on issues like their self-esteem and self-confidence. But I also do things like just go into a nursery and do an hour's storytelling, you know, as a one-off. 'Cos that's sometimes your bread and butter stuff you know.'

Her storytelling work seems quite diverse. She tells me about a recent job for the NHS in Glasgow with women who had been through the psychiatric system.

'The NHS wanted to consult with the women about what they thought helped and what didn't help and what role stigma played. So they decided to do it differently and I went in as a storyteller and kind of group consultant, but using storytelling as a way of engaging with them and getting them to tell their story.'

'So how did you do that then—did you tell a story first?' I ask.

'Mmm-hmm. Yeah, I did kind of group warm up stuff to get to know each other and then I told a story and then got them to do art, some art stuff and some small group discussion stuff, some pairs discussion you know, and then come back and feed into the big group.'

'And that was successful?'

'It was really successful yeah. One of the bits of feedback was that, erm, which was great which was what I hoped, was that the women said in their

evaluation that hearing the stories made them realise that they weren't alone in their experience of struggling. And that by hearing the story of somebody else they felt more able to tell their own story. So that was great, cos that's exactly what I hoped they would feel. And it was interesting that piece of work as well because erm, the group of women were all from Asian backgrounds and I swithered about trying to use stories from an Asian source or an Asian tradition. And in the end I decided not to because I think because I'm not from—I don't generally tell a lot of stories that aren't from a Scottish or Irish root really and I think they really suit me and that's what my root is. So I just think I tell them authentically so I thought it's better to tell stories authentically that I hope will just have universal issues and universal appeal than to try and tell a story that isn't from my heritage badly, you know.'

Ruth laughs.

'And so that's what I did. And, they really went down well.'

Ruth's storytelling practice is varied, but all driven from the context of her background in social work. There is little 'performance' storytelling taking place here. The dialogue between listeners and teller is open and the boundaries between them blurred. In this sense, storytelling is a tool to encourage self-development and growth, a means to facilitate the transformational process.

Whilst Ruth's experience is quite specific to social work, other storytellers capitalise on storytelling in similar contexts. As a Church of Scotland minister, Russell uses storytelling not only in his sermons and parish visits, but as a means to strengthen connections and build communities. He has used storymaking in prisons, schools and church groups and feels very strongly about the need to tell our own stories positively in a life affirming way, as he told me,

'I think it is about encouraging people to tell their own stories, to own their own stories to discover their own stories, to discover stories that resonate with them, to share these. I think all of that is about community building, and you know, you could argue that that's absolutely fundamental to human life, is to have a strong sense of community.'

Storytelling in Scotland is often envisaged as either bedtime stories or one-off events in primary schools. However, there is a definite connec-

tion between storytelling and education. Many tellers manage to get paid work in schools (although this is increasingly difficult in the era of school spending cuts) but for some, the educational aspect is more than just the odd storytelling session. Several storytellers run CPD (Continuing Professional Development) workshops for teachers and NQT (Newly Qualified Teachers).

Judy has developed 'STORYBOXES', a project encouraging storytelling and reading for children.

> STORYBOXES were devised to support the listening and talking elements of the English Language Curriculum especially but in all surveys after pilot studies teachers recognized that use of Storyboxes furthered aims and outcomes across the curriculum. In particular the Storybox was seen as effective concept in achieving the aims of The Curriculum for Excellence.
>
> Each box contains toys and objects to stimulate participation and imagination. Cards give teachers ideas for circle and group games, hints and tips on how they can become a storyteller/role model. A set of simple stories to "absorb" and retell is included and finally activities that will help children create oral stories for retelling.
>
> That the teacher becomes a role model by telling stories is a key factor in the effectiveness of the Storybox concept.
>
> STORYBOX activities encourage children to listen to and interpret instructions. Games and stories stimulate active listening enabling children to recall stories and acquire the techniques for retelling these stories. Children who listen to different types of stories are able to analyse story elements and enjoy predicting outcomes. The Storyboxes usually contain examples of a few different story types. The teacher-cum-storyteller provides a role model for children and the various techniques of storytelling can then be passed on to the children.
>
> (Storybox information leaflet)

Judy also works with parents, running workshops to encourage them to read and tell stories to their children and demonstrating how powerful and calming storytelling can be.

Other examples of applied storytelling include environmental stories from countryside rangers, language acquisition for female immigrants and even storytelling as a vehicle to ground sculpture or wood carvings. Everywhere there are examples of the use of stories to share language, culture and local dialect.

4.5 'The stories were always there': Cultural Storytelling

Apart from individual family traditions and work related storytelling, oral culture in Scotland is heavily indebted to ceilidh culture and the traveller community. Hamish Henderson (Henderson and Finlay, 2004) was one of the first to appreciate and document the travellers' oral culture and traditions. Their way of life has all but died out now, the remaining members living in 'scaldie' lifestyles, settled rather than travelling, with no younger generation willing to take up the mantle of story and ballad bearers. Many stories and ballads have been captured in print and recordings and many traveller tales are told by storytellers today, but the traditional way of life has ended. Renowned tellers such as Duncan Williamson and Stanley Robertson have recently passed away and with each passing the loss to the storytelling community and culture is immense.

I was lucky enough to meet up with Jess Smith (best selling author, traveller, storyteller and singer) and chatted to her about storytelling and the traveller ways.

Comfortably ensconced in a brown leather chair, with a cup of tea in front of me, and clutching my video camera, I look expectantly towards Jess. It's a beautiful sunny day outside and I can see sheep grazing on the hill through the large window opposite me.

'I think I started, to be totally honest with you Debbie, I didn't start—I am part of an ancient weave of Traveller stories, be they fact or fiction, passing from one to other, a myth, a legend or a truth. It is a privilege to be part of such a vibrant culture. Until we were forced to go to school nobody on the outside heard of our tales. A lot of it has to do with education. Laws were introduced around the 1940s that every child regardless

of background had to have an education. To attend school for a certain span of their lives was very important. This law was taking roots when I was a child but in my parents and grandparents time although schooling was available many Travelling people who were wary of the establishment didn't trust authority and avoided towns and cities where their children could be forced to go to school. There had always been a form of prejudice towards Travellers so great numbers refused to be parted from their youngsters and opted instead to continue educating their own ways. This was done through stories. Tales of earth, water, fire, creatures of caves, moor land, tales of night and day; nothing written down just simply passed in an invisible book of wisdom. Even to this day a tiny minority cannot read and write, relying alone on their communication skills.'

Jess describes how information would be transformed into a song or poem or story to be learnt and remembered until it could be passed on to the intended recipient.

'So, to certain travellers, all knowledge had been gained by the way the story was handed down. It became part and parcel of their very being and explains why they were very quick witted. Important crucial news sent to an intended, depended entirely on the imagination and sharp wit of the carrier. Details were pressed into lyrics and bodied by a tune easily remembered. What was for instance a death of a loved one became forever a ballad. In its journey other voices would add their own pain and sorrow until what began as a—say twelve verse piece ended as a twenty verse one and so on; ah the power of words. The voice was then a heart and soul vessel and this explains why Traveller balladeers sing with a depth of feeling; you'll not hear anything like it; the conyach, that's what we call it. This is seldom heard in singers learning and performing Traveller songs and to a smaller degree; stories. In far off days such skill of song, verse and story was bread and butter to entire families and I don't exaggerate when I say such skill is never lost to time, sadly it's suppressed nowadays because it is no longer needed—we lift a phone and hey presto—news relayed. But it's in the genes you know; it's in mine, I can't stop telling stories and singing songs, I'm happy living in the past, can't be bothered with the techno world; too fast paced for me.'

I've got seven sisters, there's eight of us you know, yet I am the only storyteller. When old storytellers used to gather us kinchen around their feet

to hear another gem, I soaked up every thread of that ancient tale. Once heard, I'd repeat it over and over much to the annoyance of my sisters. At five years of age my home was a Bedford Bus—a forever holiday home—that's what it was to me you know. Winter nights when day clapped away too soon I used to tell my pillow everything encountered during the day—school time—playing among forests, riverbanks or maybe just watching snow fall on hilltops and I did it Jack fashion. Jack was always the hero. Out there in the big bad world he had many enemies but he still survived.'

Our bus home was to me the best place in the whole wide world but not to my dilly morts (sisters)—to them it was unsuitable you see; they wanted a kier cane (house), like 'scaldie folk' (settled). It was me who wanted to live in a four wheeled home forever.'

Jess has written about her early life in the bus in Jessie's Journey (2002) and whilst it is a 'warts an' all' account, she portrays it so engagingly it leaves me feelingly slightly envious that I never grew up living on a bus. In fact, when I read her autobiographies I find myself trying to identify with her. My own childhood was spent in a mixture of places in Scotland and England, moving every couple of years due to my father's job. Even now when people ask where I'm from, I find it difficult to know what to answer. I half jokingly wonder whether there is some traveller blood in my family.

Jess sips her tea and continues, 'What was happening was the old traditions were waning and dying in my family, perhaps they were afraid of ridicule by mainstream society I don't really know. They wanted to be the same as scaldies (settled people) and not like travellers at all. But you see it was the opposite for me, I clung to every thread of my culture. To keep it alive was more important than anything else really. I was feart it would disappear and that may have been the reason why I put pen to paper—a strong factor and desire to share handed down tales. I didn't jan (understand) why my sisters had no respect for the old ways; the bridle paths and drove tobhars (roads) of where many of our ancestors had lived and travelled in peace, should have encouraged them to show love and to honour the old ones but it takes all kinds to make a world. Well you know we continued for ten years living in the bus and then a trailer (caravan). By the time I'd reached fifteen half the family realised their dream and moved into houses, whereby me, well I only knew how to survive on the tobhar. At the time I'd no plans to marry but if I ever did it would most certainly be a Traveller

chavi. At least that's what I thought until I fell for a scaldie lad and we've been the gither for forty years this December—three bonny bairns we had too. Now got seven grandchildren.' As Jess speaks she uses her free, non-tea holding hand to pace her words.

I look around the immaculate, spacious living room, decorated in neutral tones and am struck by how different this must be from the bus she grew up in. Yet the house she and her husband live in seems very fitting. Although they are close to the small town where I went to school, the house is very rural, set amongst green hills, accessed by passing over a cattle grid and surrounded by nature. The garden is filled with bird trays and food for birds and animals.

'Do you think that the culture will still remain?' I ask her.

'It's dying as we speak and drink our tea. I talk about it but I don't live it because there's no sustainability with our handed down skills of working tin, basket weaving, peg whittling berry picking and tattie lifting. Modern day Travellers I can't speak for but my travelling days as a free as a bird hurling up down the countryside is no longer lived by anyone—that culture has passed away but my heart is fair gladdened that through my books it's resurrected. I'm recording it, you know, orally and by the pen, in the hope that all hantle (people) but most importantly young travellers are aware of their identity, with its language. We even have a religion which is joined closely to the earth.

'I didn't marry a traveller gadji even although I promised myself I would but hey who knows the working of the heart. At times when I think of what a bright and available education we have in Britain I'm overjoyed that in the years ahead students with travelling backgrounds, with studied knowledge, will have the means to research where the origins began and with pride say, "Right, I've got this ability now. I've been right through university, I can do this." And have that pride in their roots to say, "There are books and documents with the knowledge I need so I'm really, really gonna work hard to find the answers my ancestors were denied." And they'll be listened to because they have an academic background and they will not be ignored, it'll be their generation that'll do it and will be respected into the bargain—oh what a day that will be.

'My generation is lost, lost in racism and prejudice, steeped in it, they can't dig themselves out of it, they'll have to sleep in the earth with it. But

the new generation, that's where I put my hope because it's them I write for you know, that's who I write for. My books are very, very successful with people of a certain age, but I know the young like them as well, not only because I've put a lot of humour into them but a lot of hope too. In my latest novel; Bruar's Rest—I've included enough factual stuff to stir imaginations on to think, "Wait a minute, what truth is there in that book?" Others will say, "I'm hungry enough to find out more about this." Well now Debbie, is there enough information about Traveller culture to urge readers to find those illusive origins and rightfully slot us into history books.'

Travellers all over Europe have been, and still are, a marginalised and much maligned group. In Eastern Europe the Roma are still existing on the fringes of society, the poorest, least educated people. The tales and scars run deep. Jess relates a story of her aunts and uncle going to school in Pitlochry, the 'tinkers experiment'. The children were sprayed with DDT before being allowed to enter the tin building and spent the lesson laughing at each other with their dark eyes and white powdered skin. The teacher gave up in disgust, saying, 'Oh I can't teach—you're ignorant, you're not worth teaching, you havenae got the brain to do it.'

Jess continues enthusiastically about her wealth of stories.

'The stories were always there. They were around the campfire; they were at my mother's breast, never far away from me, always there. I was like a leaf on a page of a living book and on that page was me and the stories and it was important that I carried them from one place to another sharing and giving. Some storytellers are possessive about their tales but I'm not a greedy person, I don't believe in, in saying, "That's mine." In fact, the sharing to me is more important than the telling, you know, I want people to hopefully tell the tale, even do so in their own way. And if a person doesn't take a story that I've given them and appreciate it, then I've not done a good job of passing that on, I've failed in my telling. So I work hard at getting those characters believable in my tales and to be a storyteller you've got to be in your characters and be them or else you're useless.'

Like many Scottish storytellers, Jess is very keen to emphasis the sharing aspect of telling. Stories are shared around and passed on from teller to teller. It is important to be truthful to the ideal of the story, to make it believable, and authentic in its believability. She demonstrates this open sharing by giving me some advice on telling, a mini-masterclass in story-

telling many budding tellers would give their right arm for.

'The only way a story can be believable is if the teller believes in it themselves. And I have shared campfires with the old travelling people, I have sat on the deathbed of old travelling folk and I've heard that living character coming through, you know, the stories and that to me is—' Jess pauses. '—Is the crunch. The crux of it is to believe wholeheartedly in the tale. Two people can tell a story and if someone says to you, "What do you remember about that story, was it that person that told it, or that person?" And if they say, "That person" or "That person", then they have each failed in telling that story. Because the answer should be "The story." Because that's the giver.'

The importance of 'story' has been repeatedly impressed upon me in the complex relationship between story, teller and listener. Sometimes I ponder on the autonomy of stories, thinking it must be possible to trace their evolution and journey between oral tellings, to tell their stories. The romantic notion that there are stories in the ether appeals to me, stories waiting in silence to be rediscovered and retold.

I ask Jess where she gets her stories from and she sketches out a quick anecdote about her uncle Willie telling all the children stories in the evening.

'I would sit at a campfire for days on end, nights on end listening to the storytellers, ancient storytellers. My uncle Willie was a great storyteller; Willie Murrison from Aberdeen. And he was great in as much as he never really told a tale. He gave you an idea and you told it, but you didn't know it, he was so good! And he would say to us, "Now bairns, have you washed your faces?" "Aye, aye."

"'Right, sit yersel roond doon aboot ma feet here. Watch you dinna get burnt on that fire now, push they sticks oot of yer road, come on in here now bairn.'"

Jess makes motions to the story children and campfire round her feet as she speaks.

'And you'd be sitting there looking at his face. "Now, where did we leave Jake last night? Come on now, who was paying attention to Uncle Willie?" And all our fammels (hands) would go up, you know and we'd shout to deafen, "He was hingin' fae the cliff Uncle Willie, and the crocodiles were snapping their jaws above his heels.'"

Her hands come together, making snapping motions of the crocodiles.

"'No no no no no, ah didn't leave him like yon—" "Aye ye did!" "No, no, no." And somebody would say, some really concentrating bairn from the night before, would say, "He was hangin' by his pinkie uncle Willie." "That's a clever bairn, now let's go on with the story."

'He hadn't a clue did our uncle, you know, he was just getting all those facts out o' us so he could remember where he left off the night before. And then he would just kick start Jake's journey in his imagination and go on, "Well there he was runnin' through this and the cloggy-hoppers were running at his back and they were nipping his bare heels, and champin his curly pow, and he saved the queen's life by massagin' her heart when she fell out the tree and he did this and that. Uncle Wullie if in the mood would gear his brain into overdrive piling monster problems at oor wee Jake the adventurer.

'What horrors awaited us-the listeners, when our teller would snap his fingers and say, "Now, bairns, away to your bed." Oh that was the most awful let down in the en-tire world. We'd clasp our hands and beg, "Uncle Wullie, tell us what happened to Jake, pleeeeeezzzz!"

'Without so much as 'a by-your-leave' the auld fella would simply say, "We'll find oot the morn, but aye remember, behave yersel, dae as yer telt, mind yer chores, help yer mammy, dinna think bad thoughts an' the morn's nicht, we'll a' sit here again and find oot how far Jake gans, is that ok?" "Oh, uncle Willie tell us now, how can we sleep!" "Away to bed afore I rouse myself an tell ye nixy!" And so before our teller of tales lifted a stick and whelped our legs we were away to bed.'

Jess mimes biting her nails in mock suspense for the next part of Jake's story. I smile.

'The next day there we were, sitting there, tidemarks round our necks where we'd dichted our faces with a skinfu' o' water, staring into the tellers ruddy brown face awaiting transportation to another world—Jake's world, our very own hero of the imagination. And as per usual Uncle would say, "Richt noo, hoo wis listenin?" And of course, we knew exactly where he'd been left, 'cause we were young and fresh-minded and he was an old man. He'd forgotten and he didn't care because he knew that we knew.

'And listen to me now Debbie, you might think nothin' of this but I bet some sharp minded body had heard my Uncle tell his Jake tale and I wouldn't be at all surprised that it was him who invented soap operas, you

know, Coronation Street and such like, and just like them forever storylines, our dear old Jake never stopped his journey of mighty adventures. Jake never aged, never settled down, never married; he was just still running through the jungle or sky scrapers or whatever. The greatest adventurer, who ever lived in the mind of eager storytellers, invented by my uncle Willie Murrison.'

Jess seems unable to stop telling stories. They pour out of her. During the interview she tells me two full stories complete with actions, quite apart from anecdotes about her life. I am a captive audience, enthralled by her skill and genuine love for stories. They seem to be an intrinsic part of her, bound up in her background and history. Jess begins to tell me again about the need to believe in the stories you tell, to have knowledge of the surroundings. This knowing of stories and landscape reminds me of Keith Basso's (1996) powerful ethnography on the connections between landscape, stories and culture with the Western Apaches (see chapter 2.1). Although I have not come across anything as intense as Basso relates, Jess' words stir a sense of connection be-tween place and story and knowledge.

'And as I say, you've got to go into the wood, you've got to look at the trees, you've got to find the roots, you've got to see the monticlear (water) trickling over the clachs (stones) before you could actually take that story and give it life. And any story like that. You can't sit in the house and tell a story about the environment unless you're breathing it in, unless you're living in it.

'See what I believe, is that this in me is a gift—who gives these gems out I don't know but such a gift must never be ill-treated or ignored, its part of my roots, through my blood line. And I'm very grateful for it, you know, that I can live and love those characters.

I'll probably end up in a nursing home when I'm about seventy-odds, telling folk stories and full o' the Alzheimer's but still telling the stories! Still enjoying stories, Debbie.'

Storytelling is part of traveller culture. Life as a traveller was not without difficulties, family feuds and a basic struggle to make ends meet set it out as a hard life, quite apart from the general ostracism from settled folk. But the oral culture captures both aspects of life on the road, the lyrics of *Yellow on the Broom* showing the freedom and connection with nature, whilst the darker, hard side of the life can be found in stories such as the caution-

ary Burker tales and Sheila Stewart's *Pilgrims of the Mist* (2008).

Apart from traveller culture, traditional ceilidhs supported storytelling across Scotland. Two of the tellers in Blether Tay-gither are particularly fond of using local dialect in many of their stories, having been forced to speak 'English' at school. The local language is part of their heritage and whilst I do not understand many of the words individually, within the context of a story all becomes clear. These stories reinforce the tellers' own cultural identity whilst passing on the language and stories.

Understanding some of the background influences of storytellers helps us to comprehend their motivations and begins to give an insight into the storytelling culture in Scotland. Travellers like Duncan Williamson, Stanley Robertson and Jess Smith played a crucial role in the development of the Scottish Storytelling Centre and the wider resurgence of storytelling, raising its profile.

Chapter 5
The Relevance of Storytelling

'I think we'll be storytelling when the world's coming to an end'
Jess Smith (interview)

'Do you think stories are relevant to today's society?' I asked, only half joking. It was no surprise that the answering shout from storytellers was a resounding 'Yes!' But a detailed look at the responses show the nature of stories and telling in local culture. The answers centred around three themes of education, promotion of cultural understanding, and belief in story as an antidote to modern life. Interestingly, there was no real mention of a need to preserve heritage, or a call to return to traditional roots. This reflects the applied nature of storytelling. Oral tradition and stories are upheld in specific contexts, without this very practical application in real environments the oral tradition would flounder. Stories are everywhere. At the bus stop, explaining symptoms at the doctor's surgery and in advertising were just some of the examples story-tellers gave me of stories in everyday life.

5.1 Relevance to today: Education

Language development is vital not only for children but for adults learning second languages. Frances teaches English as a second language to female immigrants and uses stories as a way to encourage students to practise language skills. She sees storytelling as a 'non-threatening' approach where the women can speak together, as a chorus, as they learn and recite stories in a group. As she explained, learning a new language can be a daunting experience,

> If you ask someone to do it individually, or even ask someone in class to read out from a short passage—some people love doing it, but other people can feel, "No, I'm going to make mistakes. I don't want to do that."

The stories act as a complement to her more formal teaching, a welcome break to 'wind down the week' on a Friday afternoon.

The act of storytelling is not passive for teller or audience. Active listening is a skill, acquired by practice. Former teacher Judy cites the development of listening skills as a key outcome of storytelling. Her school-based project, StoryBoxes, has had great success in schools and is now being rolled out across more schools in Scotland.

Another project she worked on was for North Lanarkshire council, writing a booklet for parents of nursery and primary one children. This was specifically designed to address problems with listening skills by encouraging parents and carers to tell stories to children in the home environment. The booklet was supplemented by organised storytelling sessions and workshops with children and their parents so that *both* parties could experience live storytelling. The benefit of this approach is that parents could observe their children during a storytelling session.

> 'It's quite amazing, you normally will get someone in the group saying, "Well I can tell you this,'" Judy raises her eyebrows slightly and adopts an incredulous voice. "'I've never seen my little Tommy sitting that long and he was just!'" She holds up her hands in a gesture of speechlessness.
>
> 'You know—"Amazing, he was just amazing, he was just so taken up with what was going on." So, they can see for themselves the power—', Judy pauses, 'of storytelling, just when they can see the difference when the child can listen, and the reason for this is it's 0.2 of the curriculum time can be spent on listening skills—and that shocks parents.'

Apart from developing core listening and talking skills, stories can impart teaching and knowledge. This is one of the obvious benefits of stories and

has been much discussed by Jack Zipes amongst others. Stories (especially those encased in print) reflect society values and many folktales were wrested from their natural context to promote Edwardian morals (Zipes, 1983). A few storytellers mentioned the 'teaching without preaching' ability of stories in the formalised interview setting, yet in my own personal experience of storytellers I have noted that many tellers are chary of citing embedded morals as a defining factor. I have often heard that a story does not need to have a moral.

> It's very important not to impose a moral on the story, "Hammer the point and you don't leave room for a decision." I think this is so important in stories. You tell the story. The story tells its own story and the listener takes the message from the story that has relevance.
>
> Senga (interviewed storyteller)

One of the great strengths of storytelling is that each individual listener takes something different from the tale ('no eyes or ears hear the same story' – Jess). Some stories seem to defy categorisation, Propp's (1968) morphology of tales applies to a subset (Russian folktales), but I have heard Inuit stories which leave my Western senses of story befuddled, unable to envisage a coherent plot far less a moral. The sense and messages behind the stories I have heard, told and experienced are more subtle than the clumsy rewritings handed down in common literature and Disney adaptations (Zipes, 1997). Many stories have a message but is it important or necessary for all tales to instruct or pass on wisdom? Can stories simply be told for their own sake and for beauty of the art itself? Bruner and Zipes (1983) would disagree with this;

> Stories are surely not innocent: they always have a message, most often so well concealed that even the teller knows not what ax he may be grinding.
>
> (Bruner, 2002, p. 5)

In comparison, Sawyer condemned the need for storytelling to constantly validate itself and claimed that value can lie solely in its intrinsic qualities.

> If storytelling be the art we have granted it to be, then should we not accept it on the same terms on which we accept all art, and free it at the outset from all moral and utilitarian purpose? In this there is no intention of not recognizing or not understanding the broad educational value of storytelling. What I am decrying is the telling of stories to impart information or to train in any specified direction…To link moral purpose to any art is both absurd and sterile.
>
> (Sawyer, 1997, p. 32)

It is often the case however, that even if the narrative itself is not explicitly preaching a moralistic message, it is encoding knowledge from other spheres, for example a rich sense of local culture or dialect. Today's storytellers get much of their work in schools and education settings, often asked to respond to project theme or topics, such as local industry. It could be said that the role they are perceived to play is that of an entertainer, providing light relief from the more formal learning environment, yet taking on board what has been said here, the stories still *teach*, this 'learning by stealth' continuing the traveller tradition of educating through tales.

Robbie, a storyteller who specialises in telling and singing to young children, talks about how embedded story messages can help children to learn and relate to characters relevant to their own life.

> You can see, if there's a wee girl who's you know, not confident, got low self esteem, maybe coming from a troubled background, you can find a story that will help them to rise up above that. There's so many stories about, old stories you know, that there's the wicked stepmother and the father marries and so it's kind of—today's society there's so many second marriages and you know, children from one family, children from another, and there are stories where the children do come together and fight the fight and so on. And Hansel and Gretel as well. They get taken away into the forest and left for dead. But, they're clever enough to work out how to trick the witch and they escape and get back. So, yeah, so there's a lot of relevance today, 'cos these situations are all around us.

Aside from this stealth learning, the process of telling stories to children builds up a relationship, and is a sign of 'an emotional investment' (Judy) between teller and listener, parent and child. Owen described to me how stories create a connection and develop with the child. Owen has a young daughter who he tells stories to and he has no doubt noticed this story growth and connection in his own practice.

The ability to process and draw out inferences from stories is instrumental to good communication. Schank (1995), approaching narrative from an artificial intelligence background, claims that intelligence is the ability to select appropriate stories from memory and use them in conversation. 'Human beings,' he says, 'are collections of stories' (1995, p. 135). Stories are more than mere facts, they are knowledge and understanding. The more stories you have then the better equipped you are to select the correct story, thereby equating to higher intelligence.

5.2 Relevance to today: Cultural Exchange

Another relevance of storytelling is its cultural significance. Technology is shrinking our world, enabling us in theory at least, to reach out and connect with people on the other side of the geographical world. Yet there is still a tremendous amount of scare-mongering from the press about the dangers of other cultures (for example the virtually daily tabloid headlines raging against immigrants and asylum seekers). Several of the storytellers I interviewed use stories to share and learn about other cultures. Frances encourages the women she teaches to discuss stories, asking if they have similar stories to the ones she tells.

> I'm teaching English as a second language so the women have stories from their own cultures. I get them to first of all read stories or you tell them a story, "Do you have something like similar?" "Yes we have - we call it this." And they tell you the version they know, you know. Instead of erm, the wolf and the three sheep, it's the three goats, or it's the—the crocodile and the three chicks or something like this. But it's the same story, all over the world and there is a link. And then you give them the story so that they can take it home and try and tell it to

> others, and they usually like that, joining in the stories with the—especially ones with movements and things. Then they feel that they can take it home and tell it to their children.

Discovering stories from other places not only shows differences but sometimes more importantly demonstrates the similarities. The Village Storytelling Centre in Pollok has done a lot of work in the local community with intergenerational groups, asylum seekers and local Glaswegians. Rachel Smillie used to head up the centre (she was Glasgow's first Storytelling Development Officer and is now working at a place dedicated to story sharing between people of different faiths and cultures). I spoke to her the week before she started her role as Glasgow's Storytelling Development Officer.

After driving around housing estates for what seems like hours, vaguely lost, I finally spot St James' Parish Church, park the car outside and go into the imposing looking stone church. It's quite dark inside and smells like an old church, a bit musty, until we get into the more modern office area upstairs.

Rachel gives me a tour of the centre. It's like a rabbit's warren; narrow corridors and a steep staircase lead from the offices to a large church hall downstairs. We pass down a couple of steps and enter the main church. Cold and austere, the church itself is substantial, all stone pillars and rows of pews. Rachel leads me across the church towards a floor-to-ceiling glass wall with heavy curtains drawn open behind it, so it effectively closes off the right hand section of the building. She opens the glass door and we enter the storytelling area. The ground floor is like an old museum set, with an old fashioned stove and authentic-looking washing hung out to dry along the back wall. To the right a painted greengrocer's façade disguises a door next to a small kitchen. Small tables and chairs are arranged like a café.

Rachel tells me that this is where they hold ceilidhs once a month and have school groups. To the left under the stairs is the IT suite of about four desktop computers with headphones. Upstairs is split into two smaller levels, with a music section on the lower (strewn with maracas and other in-

struments) and a storytelling circle on the upper level. Rachel explained that when school groups come to visit the usual set up is that they listen to a story on the top level, then split into three groups. One group works on the computers downstairs, one with the musical instruments and the third focuses on other craft and story activities. The sessions do not tie directly into school projects but help with broad skills such as language acquisition.

Rachel leads me back to her office in the other side of the building and I ask about some of the projects the Village has been running. The Centre has many projects on the go and finding funding is an ongoing issue, but most of the work they do centres around using stories to develop a sense of community between races and between generations. Pollok is a large district on the south-western side of Glasgow, originally built to re-house families from the over crowded inner city in the 1920s to 1950s. There are now a substantial number of refugees and asylum seekers living in the area which has led to community tensions. Some of the Village projects attempt to address these issues by providing a focus for local residents. Rachel recounted their 'star story' of a local Scottish woman who got involved in a play the Village produced. The play depicted the relationship and tensions between a Muslim woman and her Scottish white neighbour, who through events (physical abuse by violent partner and police raid) overcome their original animosity and become firm friends. By the end of production the local woman took a drink of water from a Congolese man's bottle. When reflecting on the personal experience of being in the play she said that, three months earlier she would never have drunk from the same bottle as someone black. Since then, Rachel told me, the woman has now become active in defending the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, even speaking on television about it.

The Village have produced a raft of books as outcomes from writing and story gathering projects, including Buffalo Horns, a collection of stories from around the world gleaned from the community. The centre also runs a reminiscence group with older community members. Another successful project the Village ran was Doors Open. Sitting in Rachel's office, I ask her to tell me more about Doors Open and how they used storytelling.

'Well, what we did with this Doors Open project—' Rachel stretches forward to the low coffee table between us and waves a copy of the Door Open book to the camera. She continues, '—Was, we got young local peo

ple—young, sort of in their teens—interviewing, finding out the stories of older, well adult, asylum seekers. Finding out where they used to live, what their country was like, why they left it, what it was like when they first came here.

'And then we got young asylum seekers asking older local people about the places they lived in before they came to live in this housing scheme in the 1950s. So a lot of those folks had lived in maybe overcrowded tenements in different parts of Glasgow, Gorbals, Plantation, Kinning Park and then they come to live here. And here they were with a house and an inside bathroom and toilet and garden and green areas and green space and rivers and so on. So we wanted them to get to know each other and to find out about each other and to hear those stories and then to find ways of recording them and we've done that in the book. And erm, made a short film of that as well, so it's, it's people's own stories here that've been shared and helped to cement the community and to remove suspicion and to make people more aware of each others circumstances, and histories.'

Storytelling in this sense is more than folktales, but personal histories which em-body culture. The sharing of these stories helps to promote understanding and empathy. This cultural exchange is perceived by storytellers to be a core application and relevance for stories today.

5.3 Relevance to today: modern life is rubbish

The third main argument cited by storytellers regarding the relevance of storytelling in today's society appears to stem from a somewhat pessimistic world view. Storytelling is seen as a weapon against the savageries of modern life. This may seem a romanticised ideal of storytelling pitted against technology and in many ways it is, but there are some grains of truth and a lot of positive hope and action in the premise. Frances sees computers negatively in some lights, though she does use them in work and at home and recognises the benefits and need for them. Yet she says, despite the face that we are 'sociable creatures', 'we are in danger of becoming insular'. This, she claims, is why 'storytelling is growing in so many places'.

Similarly, Owen suggests that part of the resurgence in traditional crafts such as storytelling is due to contrast they offer to computers,

> I get the impression that a lot of adults are coming back to things like reading and storytelling because it's a lot more accessible and simple, and there's a warmth to it that you don't get from technology.

Fear of the future and the notion of storytelling providing a solution was addressed most specifically by Donald. He feels that storytelling provides a form of human interaction, giving a pattern or structure to it, versus the 'isolation' increasingly common today.

> It's absolutely essential for human beings to interact with each other in a quality way, to relate to each other…And if we don't achieve that, if we don't achieve those patterns within this new global order, you know, which is animated and driven by technology, if we don't find the technology that serves these things, then we'll end up in a kind of nightmare of our own creation... 'Cos it's pretty severe times that we're moving into you know, in terms of where the world's at. So I think storytelling remains very, very important...It's something that's very old but it's never been more relevant.

However, Donald is not adverse to change, recognising that change is an inevitable part of life. Stories change and react depending on the setting.

> So, when an audience in a storytelling cafe here is listening to Katlego* from Botswana sharing stories from her culture in Botswana but recreating them for us here in the middle of Edinburgh, there's something different happening there than if she was telling that story in a school in the Eastern Kalahari region in Botswana. But they're connected, they're very connected…And when she goes back and tells that story again, in the Eastern Kalahari, it'll be coloured by the fact that it's been shared and enjoyed here. So something has moved on there and changed but it needn't be a change that is deracinating or destructive because it can be underpinned by a shared, you know, human understanding and the Web can serve that and help that. But not by replacing live.
>
> [*Name changed]

Donald's description of the variety of the retellings illustrates exactly how much the setting in which stories are told affects them.

The fear of the future is not only for what it brings but for what it may overwrite. However, only one teller spoke to me of the need to preserve heritage, for fear of losing it in the face of technology. The role of technology in relation to storytelling will be discussed in more depth in (see chapter 10 and *Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling*) but it is interesting to note that some groups of people are using the Inter-net to store and share elements of their culture (Living-Cultural-Storybases-2009). What we must be aware of, however, is that the digital version should supplement and not replace the oral stories. Carpenter (1995) describes the carefully constructed filming of a male initiation rite in New Guinea which marked the final involuntary initiation—'Film threatened to replace a ceremony hundreds, perhaps thousands of years old.' (1995, p. 487) Storytelling in the UK has coexisted with literacy and technology for a long time. There is not the same potential of lost culture to be frightened of. Contemporary storytelling suffers almost from the opposite problem, taking narrative from print and transformed it back into the spoken word. As Owen told me, some people are in fact discovering storytelling as a turning away from technology.

My background is firmly on the technology side of the divide. I discovered user centred design relatively late and when I did it was a revelation. I hate using poorly designed software and I find the human and social implications of computing more and more appealing. At the start of my research I hoped that through iterative prototyping I could design a way for storytellers to communicate effectively through digital means. Now at the close of my doctorate research, I have achieved nothing of the sort. Not because it would have been technically difficult to create some form of online space, or impossible to replicate some forms of interaction derived from storytelling, but because I know now that this would not be appropriate for storytellers. They thrive on social face to face interaction and although they all use technology, they do not view it as an equal. I did. I know many people who do, and probably more than a few who think it is superior to real life.

The design of social spaces can learn from storytelling characteristics as I will argue in part IV, yet technology could not and should not try to replace real life interactions. Part of the struggle comes from the misconception that computers and technology are purely screen-based and static. Devices like the iPhone and the AudioBoo[1] application may hold ways to capture and transmit stories more effectively and unobtrusively than traditional personal computer mediated technology.

As I reflect back on my initial plans for my work with storytellers I note how far my viewpoints have changed. I now have little desire to see all my storytelling friends attached to keyboards. Some of them have now joined FaceBook and some are obstinately holding out. Yet even in those most keen to avoid computers I have seen little glimpses, new email addresses that allow attachments, the use of a computer in addition to an e-m@iler telephone[2]. The reticence seems to come from the perceived difficulty and hassle of using computers, compared to the ease of creative arts through physical craft materials. What incentive could they have to use computers? What need could it fulfil? So whilst I outwardly encourage them to join the technology ranks with the cries of a zealous convert, I secretly hope that at least some of them will continue to resist. Technology is not the be all and end all. It is a tool, created by us, for us. We need to take the power back.

Notes

1. AudioBoo is an audio blogging application which records messages from an iPhone uploads the clips to the AudioBoo website. http://audioboo.fm [Accessed 5 February 2010.]
2. For example, http://www.amstrad.com/products/emailers/index.html [Accessed 5 February 2010.]

Chapter 6
Transformational Storytelling

'I think story has the power to transform us in all sorts of ways.'
Rachel (interview)

So far the motivations and background influences of storytellers have been examined and the relevance of storytelling in today's society been discussed. Yet one key aspect remains untold concerning the appeal of being a storyteller: what does the storyteller get out of it? Why tell stories? As we shall see, the process of storytelling can be transformational for both listener *and* teller. By reflecting on my own practice and observing and speaking to storytellers it is clear that telling is not only an enjoyable experience but in addition boosts self-esteem and self-confidence, which is carried over and beyond the act of storytelling. It is easy to see then that stories have had a profound impact on our lives, encapsulating knowledge (Goody and Watt, 1968), understanding, and teaching (Bettelheim, 1978, Basso, 1996). Stories define our lives (Bruner, 2002, Schank, 1995) and bind us in our communities and belief systems.

6.1 Why do we Tell Stories?

Stories are all around us, our very lives are recounted and internally constructed as narratives (Schank, 1995). They can be told for many reasons, to instruct or educate, to uphold existing society or to subvert it, to share and strengthen culture and identity, to aid conflict resolution or simply for entertainment.

Schank (1995, p. 41) gives us three categories of reasons or intents for sharing narratives, *Me-goals*, *You-goals* and *Conversational goals*. Me-goals ('the intentions that storytellers have with respect to themselves') can be one of five, 'to achieve catharsis, to get attention, to win approval, to seek advice, or to describe themselves.' You-goals ('the intentions that storytellers have with respect to others') also have five intentions, 'to illustrate a point, to make the listener feel some way or another, to tell a story that transports the listener, to transfer some piece of information in our head into the head of the listener, or to summarize significant events.' Conversational goals are more complex, being embedded more concretely in the context of a conversation and including the dynamic of the conversation, so some stories may be intended to simply continue the conversation, rather than having a specific Me or You goal. Storytelling as described in this thesis centres around the *You-goals*, where tellers primarily strive to tell a story which 'transports the listener.'

So why do we tell stories? 'To make a better world' smacks of idealistic romanticism and though it is meant partly tongue-in-cheek there is some truthful intent. The first time I encountered the storytelling community a teller clearly articulated, with the utmost belief and sincerity, that 'storytelling has the ability to create a perfect world'. Now whether this is read as referring to the virtual worlds created in story, or whether meaning is taken as the potential storytelling has in effecting change in the 'real' physical world, it is testimony to the belief the teller had in the power of story and visual imagination.

Storytelling has and is being used with the purposeful aim of changing society; literary tales were used to both maintain and subvert social values (Zipes, 1983). As Henderson notes;

> One of the functions of folklore is to maintain the stability of culture: the basic paradox of folklore is that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him.
>
> (Henderson and Cowan, 2001, p. 11)

Contemporary storytelling is often quoted as an antidote to modern technology, harking back to a golden age—seeking to restore balance in a discordant world. Simon Heywood's research with storytellers in England demonstrates this quality:

> …participants [storytellers] felt that there was something wrong or lacking in mainstream culture and contemporary society, and that (revivalistic) storytelling could improve matters by restating time-less and universal values in the new context.
>
> (Heywood, 2004)

Obviously the desire and belief in making a 'perfect world' is a powerful and widespread ideal. Whilst historically rural storytelling may have been used largely to alleviate boredom in repetitive tasks such as spinning or weaving (Warner, 1994, Benjamin and Arendt, 1999) many folktales give a message of hope—where the underdog (often the youngest sibling) defeats the odds and ends up with a prince, or princess, and a castle (or even a cow).

The universality of narrative and its perception as a learning mechanism means that it is commonplace for much of paid storytelling to take place in schools and other educational settings (see chapter 5.1). Yet the applications of storytelling extend beyond teaching and learning. Increasingly it is being used in conflict resolution, as a form of healing therapy[1] (Cox and Albert, 2003, Wilson, 2006, p. 103), hypnotherapy (Erickson and Rosen, 1991) and community building (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999). Other uses include narrative medicine (Charon, 2001, 2004), where the focus is on developing listening skills of medical practitioners to elicit the patient's story of their symptoms and illness; and storytelling in business[2], for example Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999).

Donald Smith (2001) claims that two broad intentions provide the impetus for oral storytelling, namely 'environmental association and human significance.' This 'environmental association' can contextualise us in our locale, forming a closer bond between the landscape, stories and culture. Basso describes a particularly strong example of this connection in *Wisdom Sits in Places*, where physical places are mnemonics for stories and vice versa; the landscape and stories give a sense of culture;

> The land is always stalking people. The land makes people live right. The land looks after us. The land looks after people. (Annie Peaches, age 77, 1978)
>
> (Basso, 1996, p. 38)

In Scotland, storytelling has been and is heavily influenced by traveller culture, through storytellers such as the late Stanley Robertson and Duncan Williamson. Scottish tales, many of them from traveller tradition, are popular, and there is a definite sense of cultural identity, with local references and language used amongst tellers. As Smith (2001, p. 3) says;

> Oral storytelling, therefore, can be an instrument of personal development and a former of social values in traditional and technological cultures… Storytelling gives us back our ability to see ourselves and each other as characters in connected narratives.

Bruner suggests that narrative is an important part of telling us who we are both on a personal level and on the stories we tell others about ourselves. The creation of self in this sense is intrinsically wrapped up with narrative and identity. Identity can function on many levels and is often represented as a multifaceted concept. Jones & McEwen (2002) adopt Deaux's stance on identity, defining it as a core self which embodies the values that the individual feels he or she is composed of and a multidimensional 'outside' identity which varies and is assigned externally by others. This connects with Bruner's life stories and idea of coherent self;

> A self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce, surely the most intricate. For we create not just one self-making story but many of them, rather like T. S. Eliot's rhyme "We prepare a face to meet / The faces that we meet." The job is to get them all into one identity, and to get them lined up over time.
>
> (Bruner, 2002, p. 14)

Thus is it obvious that stories define us and our society. Through applying them and post-rationalising, we can create coherent life stories. To tell stories effectively, there must be an emotional relationship between the teller

and the story, and an under-standing of the audience so that the experience is shared.

Finally, there is the belief that we tell stories because we have to: for our sanity and for deep seated psychological and physiological reasons (Hsu, 2008, Smith, 2001). Renee Fuller's work on narrative and cognitive impairments, as explained by Stallings (1988), led her to believe that a 'story engram' may be built into the human brain.

Similarly, Bruner described dysnarrativia, a 'severe impairment in the ability to tell or understand stories', where the 'emerging view is that dysnarrativia is deadly for self-hood.' (2002, p. 86) That is, once we become unable to navigate the world of story we lose our selves.

Perhaps it is true that we tell stories because we have to. One of the storytellers from the Dundee group mentioned in passing to me that he thought he would always have to tell stories, it is something that he has to do. Like Orwell, who knew from an early age that he had to write, maybe some of us are driven to tell stories.

6.2 'All you need is yourself. Your words.'

As chapter 4 explained, people are drawn into the storytelling world largely through factors such as family history, or are exposed to storytelling through jobs as teachers or artists. But what keeps them in the world of stories?

Owen had always been interested in stories, and particularly in mythology, but it was in the context of sculpture that he first truly immersed himself in the live storytelling experience.

We sit in the café, waiting hopefully for the visual artist who is supposed to be meeting us to discuss a potential 'technology-arts-story' project. It soon becomes obvious that she is not going to turn up, so the talk turns to storytelling and Blether Tay-gither. I place the tape recorder on the table next to my cup of half drunk tea and fish around in my bag for my video camera, iPod and notepad. I explain jokingly why I have two forms of recording devices. I still remember the disappointment and frustration that flooded

over me when I played back videos of interviews for my master's project only to discover there was no sound, rendering the hours of footage useless. Ever since then, I use at least two ways of recording the audio of interviews. Owen smiles and I begin my brief obligatory introductory spiel about my research. As ever, I begin the interview by asking how Owen got into storytelling and he explains that his early interest in mythology, symbolism and folklore inspired his work as an art student and onto wood carving.

'I started carving a lot of faces and the faces were faces from stories, from mythology, and I started to get into Celtic stories and Celtic mythology. And erm,' Owen glances out of the window, 'I got the opportunity to do quite a big piece for a festival and I wanted to base the whole piece on one story. I looked for a story that worked for me and it was called the Green Man of Knowledge. And I liked the story but there wasn't enough in it to carve. There were a few things that I could carve, but there wasn't enough definite, sort of,' he pauses, '*images* that I could take out of the story and carve.' Owen uses his hands to sketch out the carving, speaking in calm, measured tones as he continues to describe how he developed the story. He sought inspiration from other stories, finding ones that were particularly rich in imagery, weaving elements of each to form a single coherent tale which was then represented visually in the final carving.

'I basically ended up completely rewriting the story so it was a new story altogether and I told somebody about the project and they said, "Why don't you tell the story as well? If you're going to the festival and you're bringing this carving, why don't you tell the story?" And I thought why not? You know, I'll go for it.

'So I took my story into the festival and told it and it went over amazingly. I was actually really nervous and didn't know how it was going to go, and it took about forty-five minutes to an hour to tell the story—so I jumped in at the deep end! And I thought, it'll be adults that'll want to sit and listen to this and it ended up being that there was a row of children sitting right in the front row. It was outside—we had the carving outside—and it was at night, lit by fire, and all these people are sitting and all the children are sitting in front of me. And I thought, they'll be off in fifteen minutes. And they sat for the whole thing, completely just—never took their eyes off me. And I was blown away by it.

'And one of them got up at the end and he came over to me and he said,

"You know, that's the best story I've ever heard." And I was like, "Wow." I felt really good about it and it felt really natural. Once I got going and got past my nerves I really got into the flow of it, and I thought I really want to pursue this as an art form and see what I can do with it.'

I struggle to recall my own first telling, relying on my journal to document it. There was certainly no epiphany. When I reflect on my own storytelling practice it is nearly always tinged with sadness. Much as I enjoy listening to (and now also telling) stories I am no natural storyteller. Like handwriting, each teller's style is subtly unique and Owen's style of storytelling is very natural and distinctive.

'And why do you story-tell? What do you get out of it? Or what do you think the benefit is to you as a teller?' I ask Owen, keen to discover exactly what the attraction is.

'Well, I really like the fact that there's a tradition to it, you know, of upholding something, even if it's just the fact of being a storyteller. Now that I tell those traveller stories that I've learnt from Duncan Williamson and some of the Celtic myths, I feel like I'm pulling something out of history and putting it back into the world again.'

There is a sense in some of the literature on storytelling (Wilson, 2006, Haggarty, 1996) that mythologising tradition is counterproductive; an illusory, romantic longing to hark back to a golden age which doubtless never existed in the first instance. Whilst it is clear that using this ideal to dominate contemporary storytelling styles and practices is detrimental to storytelling as a whole (preventing it from engaging with and progressing with current society), as a supplementary motivation it is valid. This is especially true where examples of 'genuine' storytelling (see chapter 8.3) still exist in living memory, for example that of renowned Scottish travellers such as Duncan Williamson, Stanley Robertson and Sheila Stewart.

'And it's—' Owen pauses for a moment as he thinks about the benefits of storytelling to him personally. 'I don't know what I get for, for myself. It feels right to do it, you know. I feel—I've done lots of things, especially doing art, and worked in quite a few different jobs and nothing's ever felt right, but storytelling does. I mean, making art, I really enjoy and I love doing it, but I've never got the same satisfaction from it as I've gotten from storytelling.'

Owen spends a lot of time during each summer performing at festivals

across the country, setting up his yurt and using it as a storytelling venue. Yet he finds it hard to pinpoint exactly what the appeal of storytelling is. The somewhat intangible nature of storytelling is something I have had to contend with in trying to define its characteristics (see chapter 9).

'I like the fact it's simple. I mean you don't need anything. All you need is yourself, your words and you have to have a voice. I see it as something that's going to develop right until the day I die. And that's another thing I love about it, it's something you can do, you know, you don't need any tools or anything so you can do it when you're eighty, ninety, hundred years old as long as you've still got a voice and it's going to develop right up until that time. Guess I just love it. That's the, the best way I can put it.'

I am reminded of Jess, the traveller, stating with the utmost conviction that not only does she entertain herself with stories, but that she will be telling stories 'in a nursing home when I'm aboot seventy-odds, telling folk stories and full o' the Alzheimer's but still telling the stories! Still enjoying stories, Debbie.'

Monday 29th October 2007

I need to document my last telling at the Better Crack Club in Glasgow on Friday.

My main reason for going was to meet up with a teller who was heading off to Dundee after the club, so I could interview them on the train back from Glasgow. I'd been to the Better Crack once before some months earlier so knew a couple of folk and the general feel of the club, but I hadn't told a story there.

I'm not the kind of person who learns and learns and studies stories before telling them. I probably would if I was doing it as a real job, but as I only tell occasionally – when I feel I can't get out of it! – I tend not to spend ages perfecting my stories. Because of this and because I don't think I'm compelling as a teller, I choose very short stories. So, I read a story on Friday morning and it just appealed to me on some level. I took the book with me on the train from Perth and spent the hour long journey rereading it and trying to visualise the main characters clearly, picturing their expressions, the clothes they wore, the way they walked.

When I arrived in Glasgow, I met up with a friend in a bar nearby and spent a hour or two chatting with her over a couple of glasses of wine

before we went to the teahouse, Tchai Ovna. As it happened I'd got the starting time wrong, so we were half an hour early and the first there. We settled into the best seats in the far corner of the room and debated which type of tea to order. The teahouse is a fantastic place to host storytelling. It's in the university district but is very much off the main drag, tucked away down a side street with little in the way of signs to point out where it is. It's only a small place, a single darkly lit room, crowded with benches and chairs. It serves only tea (although the twenty page tea menu is extensive) and some vegetarian food, all from a tiny kitchen barely big enough to fit two people. But it is very welcoming and relaxed, with low ceilings and nooks and crannies created by screens. A mix of odd half-broken chairs and sofas all surrounded by mismatched tables and lamps complete the look. I feel very jealous of the Better Crack Club's venue. I would love to find a similar place in Dundee.

The last time I was at the club there was a mixture of songs, poetry and stories. The host went round everyone beforehand, writing down what they wanted to tell so there were no awkward pauses in between stories. They had a break halfway through too, which worked quite well. I came away thinking that one of the key elements of storytelling is environment. Our club can resemble an AA meeting at times. I'm researching alternative venues to hold our meetings in instead.

So my friend and I were steadily making our way through our respective pots of tea when folk from the club began to turn up. Fiona was hosting the evening this time and she asked me if I was going to tell a story. As luck would have it, it was a quiet evening. The teahouse was busy, but not with people willing to tell stories. So as usual, I made excuses, but said that I had a short, fairly unprepared story and if they didn't have many names on the list then she could call me up. I duly wrote my name in the sparsely populated notebook, secretly hoping that she wouldn't need to use me. I think one of the key components in storytelling is sharing. I don't think you can just sit there and take each month without giving something in return, even more so because I'm involved in running it. But, and I always tend to say this (it's my security blanket) I qualify before speaking. "I'm not a teller, I'm a listener. I've just been trying to learn this story today so bear with me." Or something to that effect.

So anyway, Fiona was host, we started off with a group song and she told a story, then Mark told a couple before volunteering me as the next teller on the excuse that we would be leaving shortly to catch the train.

Everyone stands up to tell at the Better Crack club, so I stood up, fortified with wine and white tea, and began my qualifying speech. And then I told.

As I told something strange happened. I was in two worlds. I was in the story. I saw the queen appear in front of me, regal and dignified with a proud bearing. I saw the king, obstinate and disgruntled. And I saw the calf. As I told, the characters were with me, shadowy figures, brought alternately into focus and mist as I looked from them to my listeners. **My listeners**. For a brief spell of time they were mine.

They smiled as I described the calf with its huge, liquid brown eyes. They laughed when the calf got bigger and was still carried. And they smiled when the cow and queen were presented before the king.

After that, it went flat.

But no matter. I felt it, I finally understand what the teller gets out of it. I **was** a teller.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether I can do it again. And obviously, it might not have worked, maybe it was the wine and my vivid visual imagination, but perhaps it doesn't matter if it was real or not – I felt that it was and so gained the experience.

More importantly, I want to tell the tale again, and try to get the ending right by setting up the beginning better. I never thought I'd want to tell a story more than once, but it wants to be told and I feel a particular resonance with it. I now believe and understand Jess saying that you have to love your characters, love your story and believe in them, otherwise there is no authentic story.

[Names changed]

6.3 The Buzz of Telling

The 'buzz' of storytelling I discovered at the Glasgow club is experienced by other tellers too. Frances explains that 'if it goes well it gives [her] a feeling of elation.'

> When, you know, you've got the audience with you there's no better feeling is there? I don't think. You know, if you know that you've pulled the people there. Other times it falls flat on its face—for most of the time it falls flat on its face, but those times that you feel you have them there, it's a wonderful feeling.

Equally, Sheila describes how she gets a 'lot of satisfaction out of it.' Sheila tells stories in her role as a nursery teacher and has begun to expand her storytelling experience and story collection since Blether Tay-gither started.

> I just enjoy doing it. You know, it's fun to me. It's also wonderful to see the children and the expressions on their faces and how awestruck sometimes they are, you know. You get a lot back from them, a lot more back from them than when you're just reading somebody's book.

For Lindsey, storytelling is a creative outlet, a means to be expressive: 'I'm not artistic in the painting and drawing sides. I'm not musical, this is my way of being creative I guess. It's something very, very different, you know, my background is in being outside building things and dealing with people and it's just something very, very different to do. It's my creative form of expression.' Lindsey specialises in story-storming, or spontaneous storytelling, drawing on input from the audience for characters and settings and making a story plot up on the fly. She claims this is because she cannot remember stories, but I have heard her tell learnt stories several times at Blether Tay-gither. Story-storming is a creative, challenging process with unknown outcomes (where the story goes nobody knows) and a large amount of audience participation. I would argue that Lindsey uses story-storming not only because she struggles to learn and remember stories but because it suits her personality and style of storytelling. Developing a style of storytelling is important. When I began working with storytellers, I failed to understand that not every teller can tell every story. Through discussions with tellers and in my own storytelling I can see how this is the case. If the story does not appeal and the words do not sit right in the teller's mouth, the story is not a success. Storytelling is partly a selection of correct stories for the individual.

Apart from the elation or buzz created by storytelling, Ruth told me about the feeling of peace and calmness that comes with having told a tale.

> It creates a rhythm in your life. I mean even telling a story, you're creating a rhythmic piece of music really and so I always feel really good after I've told a story. It's almost like a meditation as well; everything else goes whoosh out of your head. And you just, you know, if you're in a good place you just get into the story and when you finish, it's like, I would compare it to the small amount of meditation that I've done really, because you do let go of a lot of conscious thought.

The sense of relaxation may be linked with the storytelling trance, a state of intense listening, described as a light hypnotic state (Stallings, 1988, Sturm, 2000). I have experienced this as a listener, and speaking to tellers about the idea of trance many of them recollected how after a story, it can take a couple of minutes to rouse the hearers again. On a personal level, it reminds me of the state of absorption that can occur from immersion in a novel or emerging into a bright cinema foyer after an intense film.

Tied in to relaxation and story trance is the fact that storytelling is a cathartic endeavour for teller and hearers. Telling one's own story is a powerful tool employed in therapeutic contexts, and both Jess and Ruth noted that telling folktales is a balancing process for teller and listeners alike as the tale 'takes them through a whole landscape journey' [Ruth]. Unlike acting a single role, storytellers must represent all characters. Whilst there is a marked difference from storytelling and traditional stage acting (that is, tellers do not generally physically become the characters) storytellers must engage with their characters on some emotional and symbolic level.

Jess' strong connection with her story characters is deeply entwined with her perception of story authenticity:

> Your tone of voice is very important. If you're telling a story about a really nasty person you've got to be that nasty person. You've got to use that tone of voice or else that story has no authenticity. And if you're ill, you need to pull in on your cheeks and blink eyelids, or if your heart's broken, it's got to break, don't be afraid to cry. And if life is getting grim, you've got to be in a bad mood. You've got to do it right.

On a fundamental level, tellers find storytelling fun and enjoyable. Jess told me (and showed me) that she can entertain herself with stories. Part of the satisfaction comes from the altruistic nature of telling, of entertaining others and seeing their enjoyment. Jess explained how you have to put your inhibitions to one side, not be afraid to get up and do a wee dance, maybe waggling your bum, (as she demonstrated!) to get a response and laughter from children. For, 'if you want your story to go to a child, an innocent child, then that story's got to have an element of humour in it. Plus the fact that you must never be afraid to make a fool of yourself when you're telling a story to a child. Don't care if your hair is messy, if your makeup's not on, if you feel a bit under the weather. Don't care about that.'

Well executed, stories draw people into the 'land where the stories grow' as the late Stanley Robertson used to say, providing a form of escapism where imagination can flourish. The simplicity of storytelling is perhaps one of its biggest advantages, not only in the inherent mobility and distinction to other art forms (such as puppetry) but in its accessibility. Listeners can attend a storytelling event and think, 'I could do that.' Perhaps not in a formal performance setting, but with their children at home or in a small storytelling club. Donald Smith, Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre cited this as a reason for the initial attraction and resurgence of storytelling:

> Just as an experiment I invited some of the traditional storytellers to come and be part of the program at the arts centre and that kind of started the thing going, because people responded to this on two levels. People responded first of all because they enjoyed the stories, they liked the style and the people and the content. But secondly, and probably more significantly for the ways things have developed since, people also got into the idea, "I'd like to do this, I could do this," you know. There's a sort of method, process or a form of communication or imagination here that people were attracted to.

This reflects on the natural quality of communication which is the essence of storytelling. Anyone potentially could do it, because everyone does tell stories.

6.4 'Sometimes your knees are shaking, your voice is cracking'

The process of storytelling (the preparation, the live act of telling, reflection and surrounding community and environment) has enormous potential for boosting self-confidence. This can apply as much to tellers as to listeners. I never realised when I began my research that some of the tellers (who struck me as very self-assured people, confident in themselves and their stories) were apprehensive and considered themselves to be shy or lacking self-confidence. However, they all professed that storytelling has helped to address this, reaching beyond the boundaries of the storytelling aspect of their lives.

As I take the turning off the motorway and drive down the sliproad, I glance over to the sheaf of printed directions and maps on the passenger seat. I sift through them with one hand, eyes still on the road, as I approach a large roundabout, scanning the road signs. 'Ok,' I tell myself. 'It's round the roundabout going right and then head for Falkirk town centre. Simple.' I finally find the right piece of paper and bring it up in front of the steering wheel, trying to decipher the next direction. By a lucky twist of fate, I end up at Callendar House on time, without taking a wrong turn. I switch off the engine and look around.

I can see the main house across the large lawn, a typically imposing country house, now situated next to a high rise housing scheme. The café is just beside the car park, so I walk over to meet up with Frances, a storyteller from Glasgow. It's still quite early in the morning so when we go into the café we have our pick of tables. We choose a table in the corner, furthest away from possible distractions and I settle into a seat, rummaging for my notepad and video camera. After we've ordered tea and cakes, we start the interview. I know Frances from my visits to the Better Crack Club in Glasgow and when she visited Blether Tay-gither.

As Frances begins to tell me how she became a storyteller, it becomes obvious that it wasn't something she was immediately comfortable with.

'Mark invited me along to the Glasgow clubs when he and Edwin set

them up. And I sat there for a year and wouldn't open my mouth.' Frances shakes her head as she speaks and bites her lip. 'I couldn't. It was too much. I couldn't do that, and of course, he kept encouraging, encouraging and encouraging. So you try it and see. Sometime your knees are shaking, your voice is cracking,' Frances smiles. 'But then it was that feeling of "Wow, I did that," you know. "I did that!" and the elation.' Her eyes sparkle.

'And then because you did it once you were expected to carry on and carry on and carry on.' Frances laughs.

I know the feeling exactly, once you have taken the step to tell a story once, in a way, it becomes something that you are expected to do more and more. To me, it is a sense of personal achievement, of integration into the group and truly bridging the gap between observer and participant.

Frances continues, 'When you know that you've got the audience with you there's no better feeling. I don't think. You know, if you know that you've pulled the people there. Other times it falls flat on its face.' She shrugs and smiles, 'For most of the time it falls flat on its face but those times you feel that you had them there, it's a wonderful feeling.'

'So do you still get nervous when you tell?' I ask Frances, as she drinks her tea.

'Oh yes,' she replies quickly, putting her cup down. 'I think if you don't get nervous you may as well say, "Bye-bye!"' Frances laughs. 'Because there's always that thing—but I'm glad to say that I'm not the only one that's done it because I've heard other professional storytellers doing it as well. You know, they've forgotten a bit and thought, "Oh gosh, I meant to say—" or, "Oh, I didn't tell you but—" and you think, "Oh thank goodness." But the thing is, that's your story for that day and it doesn't matter if you can work round the bit you've forgotten. It's not set in stone. You know, you can expand it or contract it as the occasion may be and that's one of the joys of it. It's a thing for the day.'

'And so what do you see as the benefit of storytelling to you?' I ask, wondering if the buzz of telling outweighs the nerves.

'Well, as I said before, it gives me—' Frances rests her chin on her hand. '—If it goes well it gives me a feeling of elation. Even if it doesn't go well then it shows me that I have to work on things. How can I change that? Or just dump it, if needs must, if it really bombs. It's very relaxing for me even though I get nervous and, even simple things like coming here to-

day. Making myself go, go places I've never been before, although I've been here before but both times are associated with storytelling. But going to places. I remember one of the longest drives and the first drive I ever did was—' Frances breaks off to explain to me. 'I'm not that long a driver, well for my age, been driving less than ten years. So, because you come to it late, there's a thing about an older women who's still a bit nervous I'm going to get lost and, you know, that kind of thing.' She laughs.

'Although I'm a bit better now, but at the same time I still have that feeling. I think the whole thing is it makes me do things that I would never do. If you were to say to me maybe twelve, fifteen years ago you would stand up in front of an audience, maybe two, three hundred people and speak: I'd say, "Och, you're on your bike." You know, "You're nuts. No, not me, I couldn't do that." And yes, you're nervous but it's the feeling of "I can do that" you know, the achievement.'

It is clear that Frances' storytelling practice has had a more holistic influence than simply honing her ability to tell an engaging tale. It has taken her to new places, geographically and emotionally, giving her confidence.

'Then also the fact of getting so much out of listening and hearing other people and being totally drawn in by their tales. I mean, really, you know, tears in your eyes, knots in your stomach when you're hearing and thinking, "Gosh, that's told so wonderfully. I wish—"'

Frances leaves the rest of the sentence unspoken. I understand what she means; stories can take you on journeys, depending on the skill of the teller. I have often felt that I would love to be able to tell stories as evocatively as other people. The only difference is, I include Frances' story skills in my wish list.

(Some names changed.)

6.5 For the Love of Stories

Confidence through storytelling is given not only to the teller but also translates to and is bestowed upon the listener. Robbie told me how she has grown in confidence since storytelling:

> To me, it's confidence and self esteem and it makes me rise to the challenge I would say. I'm much more confident now mixing with

> other people that I don't know. Or I'll try and if I see, somebody, you know, who's on the periphery, I'll try and pull them into it. And if they don't want to come then that's fine, I'll back off. 'Cos I can remember quite clearly being the one on the outside and being uncomfortable and not liking it.

In a similar way, Robbie described how the children she chooses in her stories are proud when they are selected.

> 'I've seen children when I've asked them something and I've picked them to give me a word. They, you know, they sit up.' Robbie sits up tall in her chair, hands clasped together, smiling.
>
> 'And one wee boy when I, at a school in Cupar, when I was doing the nightingale, I had taken a piece of fabric that was red and it had Chinese writing on it. And this wee boy, he was quite a big boy for the class. I says, "Who would like to be my emperor?" So, he, you know, he'd be one and so I put it round and he was sitting, kind of like that,' Robbie slouches a bit in her seat. 'And as soon as I put this fabric round him he sat right up, you know.' Robbie sits up tall again.
>
> 'And as soon as - when the emperor was mentioned in the story he would sit up again, you know. So, hopefully you're bringing them in and they enjoy the experience. You're giving them that wee bit of more confidence, good self-esteem I think.'

In the work that Russell has done in prisons and communities as a minister, he has found that storytelling helps in confidence building, especially in fostering a greater sense of belief in positive personal stories:

> Storytelling builds people up in themselves and in confidence. It's an empowering thing you know, to know your story and to listen to other people's stories appreciatively, you know and to take, take hold of them and even share them, you know. We try to do that within our little church community in a poorer part of Edinburgh.
>
> I mean for me, an awful lot of what's good in my life is about connections. It's about, you know, the connectivity that particularly through other people's stories and through linking stories and-and-

> and all the rest of it, you see the connectedness in life and you see the depths in life. You see the fun, you see the playfulness, you know, so all these things I think are crucial in being a human being in-in-in the way you relate to other people. So, a lot of that is in that world of story and story-sharing and storytelling.

Being a storyteller is an ongoing process. The tellers I know from Blether Tay-gither are always keen to learn and glean knowledge from events, no matter how experienced they are. This life-long learning links very closely with the comments Russell made above regarding community building and story-sharing. There are always new stories to be discovered, alternative techniques for how to develop workshops and ways to hone telling skills. As Owen said earlier, storytelling can 'develop right up until you're eighty, ninety, hundred years old.' The sense of personal growth also ties in with in-creased self-confidence and self-esteem as described previously by Frances and Robbie. Even if a story 'falls flat' there is still something to be learnt from the experience—what not to do, what parts worked, what parts need to be reworked.

Stories can reveal aspects about the teller, you cannot tell a story that you do not relate to in some way. Ruth tells mainly traditional Scottish folk tales and tries to remain true to their essence without altering plots or symbolism but she admits that she tells tales with female protagonists and 'portrays them as stronger than they are sometimes portrayed in the written text.' I have noted a similar tendency in the stories I choose to tell as well. Never having thought of myself as a feminist, my choice of tales have strong female characters and has caused me to reflect on my own beliefs.

Self-learning is perpetuated in storytelling by the community, with experienced tellers supporting more novice tellers. The formalities of this approach as adopted by the Scottish Storytelling Forum will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.2, but it is worth here relating an anecdote from Jess of tutoring a novice teller:

> I also recognise in a storyteller their fear and their ability to tell stories because they lack a certain amount of confidence and they want to please. I recognise that right away…I had a student; she was absolutely terrified to open her mouth. And I thought I'm going to get

> nowhere with this lassie.
>
> And I said to her, "Look, let's forget about storytelling, let's you and me talk about anything and everything today." And through our conversing and downing gallons of tea and chocolate biscuits, I discovered she had a fear of fire, and any story that related to heat. I tell tales of the ruler from Hades; auld Nick himself, there's so many stories about devils which portrays heat. Hell means heat and this started her fears and would block her mind to the telling. This powerful allergy (if I can call it that) caused her to stammer and stutter and not feel comfortable with her story. So I simply encouraged her to avoid these kinds of stories. Instead I shared a few tales of the water kelpie horses. Seal witches of Codrum, and the Ice witch of the frozen north. It was amazing watching her facial expressions as this new found confidence surged through her tale, you could actually see and hear how she changed, brilliant! She chose to tell the tale of Rossellini's Fruit Goblins. When I watched that lassie tell that story I thought, "Now here's a story made for her. By avoiding fire and flame and all that kind of stuff she'd found her voice." Perhaps that dilly (young girl) had plans to cure her self through a psychiatrist or a hypnotist but truth is that lassie wanted to tell stories and she had to choose a story that got rid of her fears. She found her soul in monticlear (water) to become the heroine who saved her beloved sister from the evil spell of the fruit goblins. She told that story without a hint of stammer or hesitation, she lived it, and I loved it. I could have listened to her all day; healed by the power of story.

When I was conducting the interviews I was searching for core characteristics of story-tellers—what unites them? Early ideas such as an independent nature, streak of altruism and acute social skills may form a basis, however the overriding sense and attribute that I am left feeling is that of a genuine, shared love of stories.

> I never tire of some of those stories. It's almost like I've got myself into a storytelling year where there are certain stories I tell at certain times of the year and so you mebbe only tell a story once a year, but you come back to it next year and it's like meeting an old friend in the

street or something, and I really like that. – Ruth

It is the core reason for telling. Everything else is a bonus.

Notes

1. For example Storytelling as a Healing Art International Symposium 2005 in Sweden, http://www.healingstory.com/symposium [accessed 9 February 2010]. There is also a planned Scottish National Symposium for STORYTELLING AS A HEALING ART for June 2010. Nancy Mellon is just one example of a storyteller who specialises in story-telling as a healing tool (Mellon, N. (1992) Storytelling & the art of imagination, Rock-port, Mass. ; Shaftesbury, Dorset, Element.)
2. The Storytellers (www.the-storytellers.com) create 'business narratives' to engage and reshape the stories companies tell themselves. Narrate Consulting (www.narrate.co.uk) offer a similar service, claiming to change corporate culture through narrative.

Chapter 7
The Dynamics of Live Telling

THE benefits of storytelling have been discussed in the previous two chapter chapters, both to listeners and tellers. We have seen that it can boost confidence, is enjoyable, and often educational. We have also seen that it is a unique event, the story is flexible, partly spontaneous; 'a thing for the day.' This spontaneity, this liveness, is crucial to storytelling—it makes it what it is. However the dynamics of live telling are more complex than first appear, and the following pages examine the story experience as it is situated in the 'story space' between listener and teller. The uniqueness of the live tale ensures that everyone hearing it registers it differently depending on personal state of mind at that time.

Rachel explained to me why the live dynamics of storytelling are so special;

> I think the wonderful thing about storytelling is that the story never dies. It lives, because you're telling it as a live art form. You're not bound by the same words every time. It's got its own dynamic force somehow, so that, depending on the environment, depending on the chemistry between you and the group of people you're telling to, it will vary a bit. And you know, something might pop into your head to develop the story just a wee bit, just on the spur of the moment, and you don't know why that's happened but it's maybe something—a clue that you've been given in a subconscious way by the people who are listening to you. And so it's an exciting process, and you never get sick of the stories when you tell them. I used to get very tired of reading the same stories to my children when they were young. But I never feel like that with the telling of a story.

The final point that Rachel notes is something I was concerned about when I started telling stories. I was worried that after telling the story once I would quickly get bored of retelling the tale, but happily, I found this was not the case. It was not until I read Goffman's explanation (as quoted in Drew's Karaoke Nights 2001, p. 84) that I fully understood why;

> The teller's proper relation to his tale, his telling it as if this is the first time he has told it, is generated not by him, but by his having a first-time relation to his current listeners. The genuineness and spontaneity he can bring to his telling is generated by his current listeners' experiencing of genuine suspense; he borrows spontaneity from them. Effective performance requires first hearings, not first tellings.

This quote succinctly sums up exactly why storytelling works and why the live element is vital. Interaction with the listeners, however subtle, impacts upon the created story.

Thursday 30th July 2009

My storytelling life seems to go in cycles of intensity and the last two weeks have been the intense kind. I feel completely 'storied-out.' Was at Festival at the Edge (FatE[1]) the week-end before last, which was amazing but strangely exhausting. I never thought listening to stories could be tiring, but I understand now why people say listening is a skill. Two and a half days of non-stop stories is a lot to listen to. And of course conversations with storytellers at the festival all centred around stories too. It was unlike the storytelling environments I'm used to. Whilst nearly all of the tellers I heard were excellent, the delivery mechanism was quite different. The main marquee was large, and the stage was hooked up to a PA system. The sessions I found most memorable and engaging were the ones in the smaller tents, using informal telling styles and participative elements. But this is no doubt a personal preference. Nevertheless, it was incredible to see so many tellers I had only heard about before, and I hope to return to FatE next year.

Last weekend was the Big Tent Festival in Fife where Blether Taygither had our own storytelling yurt and ran a full programme of storytelling sessions and workshops for two days. This was surprisingly less draining than

FatE, partly because there were a range of different events at the festival, but mainly because there were eight of us involved with the storytelling yurt. I didn't really do too much in the way of storytelling, but helped out with craft stuff at the workshops and handed out flyers to folk to encourage them to come along to the yurt.

I did do a little bit of storytelling though. Our closing session each day was dubbed 'Fairtrade Stories' and involved all the Blether 'rainbow' tellers. (The Big Tent weekend was the first official launch of the Blether Taygither logo which was proudly emblazoned onto polo-shirts, each a different colour, so that between us we were a rainbow of tellers. I was Yellow.)

On Saturday we had a guest teller, Judy, who told stories throughout the day. She hosted the final 'Fairtrade' slot and after an opening story opened the floor to other tellers. Well, I say that, but in actual fact she asked the audience to choose the next teller. We had been expecting a range of ages in the storytelling yurt, but ended up with an audience almost exclusively composed of children. So Judy asked the children which colour storyteller they'd like to hear from next (out of red, yellow, green, pale blue, navy blue and purple). And what did they say? The brightest colour they had to choose from. Yellow.

My mind went in panic-mode. This wasn't supposed to happen yet! The story I'd prepared was for more of an adult audience and I didn't think would work. I drew inspiration from Blether and FatE and off-the-cuff asked Sheila if she would mind if I told a story that I'd heard her tell a couple of times and had heard Jan Blake tell at FatE the previous weekend. Jan's version had a few rhymes and actions in it and I thought that could work well if I blended the two versions. I hadn't read the story anywhere, nor told it before, or practised it, but figured I knew it pretty well. (I had paid particular attention to Jan's version as I knew Sheila's and wanted to compare the two.)

So, I got up and sat on the wooden storyteller chest at the top of the yurt and began.

The story was the one about the old woman who goes to visit her daughter at the other side of the forest. On her way through the forest she meets three animals, one-by-one, who all want to eat her but she persuades them to eat her on her return journey when she will be more plump. On the

way home she climbs inside a pumpkin and rolls through the forest, past the hungry animals, all the way home.

It started well enough. (I suppose I should add that this was the first time that I'd told a story to children.) Anyway, they seemed to be into it ok. I did the whole, 'Ricky-ticky-tick, ricky-ticky-tat, here I come with my walking stick' thing which everyone joined in with. I asked them what kind of nice food the old woman ate at her daughter's house and got lots of suggestions.

The problem began when the old woman climbed inside the pumpkin and left her daughter's home, rolling along the forest path.

'And as she rolled she sang–' I said confidently before pausing. I knew there was a little song to go with the rolling. ('Here I come, here I come, in my pumpkin here I come.') I remembered the words but not the tune. My mind was blank. Completely, utterly empty. I looked around helplesslY. Lindsey caught my eye and started singing, 'Rolling, rolling, rolling.' Robbie joined in, making up the tune with Lindsey on the spot, and soon everyone else joined in too, the tune sounding suspiciously more and more like 'Rawhide' as it progressed. I can only imagine that the reference was too out of date for the children. The song occurs three times, as the woman meets the three forest animals one by one again. Each time, 'rolling, rolling, rolling' was dutifully sung. And so the story ground its way painfully to the end. I was, well, I was a bit mortified really. But once I'd resumed my seat at the edge of the yurt, I thought how it was actually an incredibly positive experience. If I'd been in a situation like that by myself, as the only teller, I would have panicked even more. It was great to have the support of the group there, especially for an inexperienced teller like myself.

7.1 The Story Triad

The following words relate a real life discussion (which took place in the comfortable location described) on the relationship between story, tale and listener, complete with diagrams which were developed as the conversation unfolded. Dialogue was captured from memory post event and was subsequently validated by the individuals who were present at the discussion.

'And from then on the pearl made the seas go in and out, and the Big Man started his long journey home.'

Lindsey pauses for a second, looking into the camera. 'Was that ok? I think that's really going to have to be it now, my voice is almost completely gone.'

I nod silently, too frozen to talk, just pleased that the filming is over.

It is a bitterly cold afternoon in late October which finds five of us gathered like truant kids in a park, having clambered over the wrought iron balustrade to get into the bandstand. Meeting up at an iconic Dundee landmark to film a story for the Big Man Walking project had seemed like a good idea at the time, but we failed to take account of the noise from the busy road bordering one edge of the triangular park. We also forgot about the railway track flanking the other side, and the dual carriageway just beyond the track. And really, none of us could have predicted that the Victorian bandstand was under the direct flight path of the unbelievable multitude of light aircraft which issues from the local airport.

Owen about to tell part of the Big Man Walking story

I quickly snap the LCD viewing panel shut and begin packing the camera back into its box. With any luck, the footage will soon be edited and uploaded to YouTube, a first for Blether Tay-gither[2]. The story, told by Owen and Lindsey, explains how the Big Man[3] (a giant puppet which went on tour round Scotland) arrived in Scotland hundreds of years ago after falling from the sky. Blether Tay-gither were due to be involved in a key event as part of the project, but when the date changed at the last minute (due to gale force winds, not the best weather for a twenty-six foot puppet to be out and about in) no-one from Blether could make it. The organisers asked us if we could make a video of the story instead. The story itself, which includes the Big Man walking into the sea, discovering a pearl and setting it in the heavens to control the tides, was a collective creation by the group at the last Blether meeting. Lindsey specialises in story storms, or spontaneous storytelling, taking input from audience and generating a story on the spot and it was her suggestion and guidance that encouraged the group to develop the story.

We take a quick look at the footage

We climb out of the bandstand one by one and unanimously agree on hot chocolate at our usual haunt, before heading towards the cars, shivering.

Sitting in somewhat old-fashioned but comfortable armchairs in the hotel bar, the legendary hot chocolates arrive. As we slowly thaw out, I tentatively steer the conversation towards stories and my research, feeling slightly unwilling to yet again foist my research needs upon the group. Reluctantly placing the warming glass of hot chocolate on the low coffee table, I reach for my notebook and pen.

Relieved that everyone is once again happy to answer my questions, I start by asking about the possibility of stories having an autonomous quality. This is more for my benefit than anything else. I first came across the idea on a residential storytelling course at Emerson College and the notion captured my imagination. I can easily visualise the life span of stories as they grow and alter across lands and generations of tellers.

'I've heard this mentioned by a few people now in different places, but I wondered what you all thought about the idea of stories having their own life force?' I venture. I explain the idea a little further but there is no immediate response from the four storytellers.

'Well,' Lindsey begins, 'the Big Man story is a bit like that. It has a life of its own. It doesn't belong to any one of us, it was created in the group environment. Whereas if you compare it to a performance teller, you know, they think the story is theirs. You know, they think they own it. And that's the big difference, we know that we don't own the stories. So yeah, definitely, they can have their own life.'

There is a murmur of general agreement at Lindsey's words.

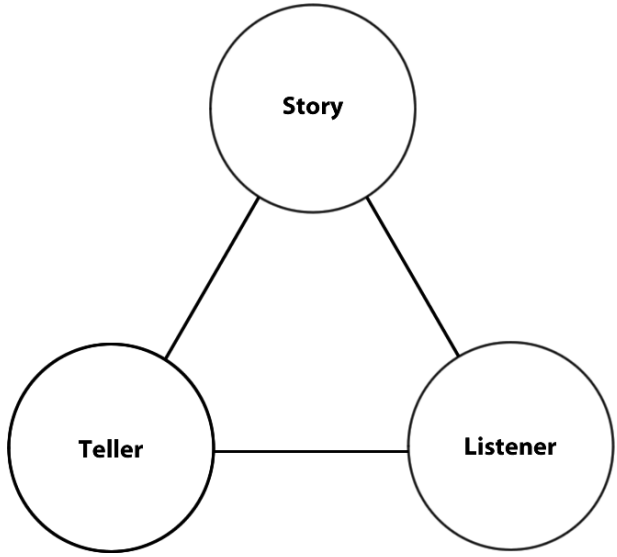
'I think that, especially in the case of myths, you know, the big, epic tales,' says Owen, 'then, there's a lot of symbolism contained in them. And so we're just using elements of that. In fact, it's something I've noticed when I've been writing my own stories, drawing on aspects of mythology, you know, trying to picture bits and adding other parts in. And something that I've found is that I'll have written a section and imagined it just so, and then I'll come across the same description of it in a book. And it'll be not just the same general idea but exactly the same, the same as I've imagined it. And that'll be in a book or part of a story that I've never read or heard before.'

'Mmm, yes that's happened to me before when making up stories,' Lind-

sey adds, sitting forward. 'You know, when I've been doing a story storm and then at the end of it, afterwards, I've read stories in books and they've been very similar.'

The discussion draws naturally to a close and so I move on to the main topic I want to discuss today, the relationship between teller, listener and story.

'Ok, thanks very much for that. Another thing which has come out of my thinking and observations is the importance and connection between the teller, listener and the story. I've tried to represent it in a diagram where there's a triangle showing the connections between them.' I turn the page in my notebook and flip it round to show everyone. It is deliberately created with post-it notes, so that it can be altered during the discussion.



'So, in this, I've suggested that the "story" element is—whilst they're all important—but I felt that this aspect is possibly the most important and that's why I've put it at the top.' I pause, looking at everyone expectantly. 'What do you all think?'

Sheila leans forward, peering at the diagram across the table. 'Well,' she says, 'as you said, they're all important, really. I mean, they're all equally as

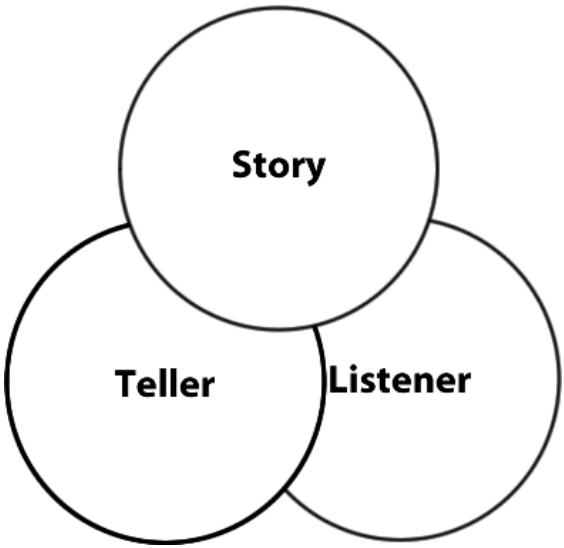
important. I don't think any one of them is more important than the others. You need all three for storytelling.'

Robbie nods, eating a marshmallow.

'What about if you put them closer together?' suggests Sheila. 'You know, overlapping.'

I quickly rearrange the sticky notes so that they overlap, like a Venn diagram, and turn the notepad round again.

'Like this?'



'Yes that's better,' says Sheila.

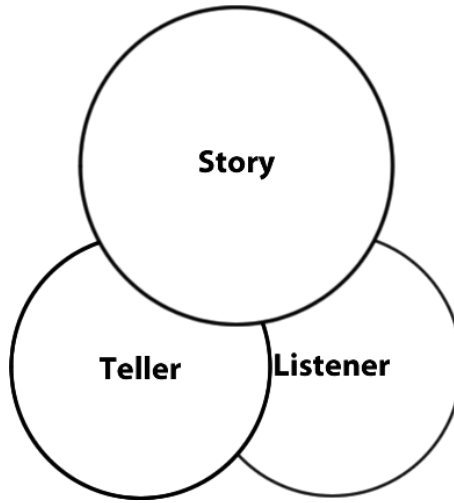
'And what about "Story", should that be at the top, or something else? Or should they all be in a line?' I ask.

'No,' Sheila replies, '"Story" should be at the top.'

'Yes, "Story" is the connection between the two,' Owen explains, 'between the teller and the listener.'

'Perhaps the "Story" circle could be a bit bigger to show its importance?' suggests Robbie.

'So like this?' I sketch out the diagram.

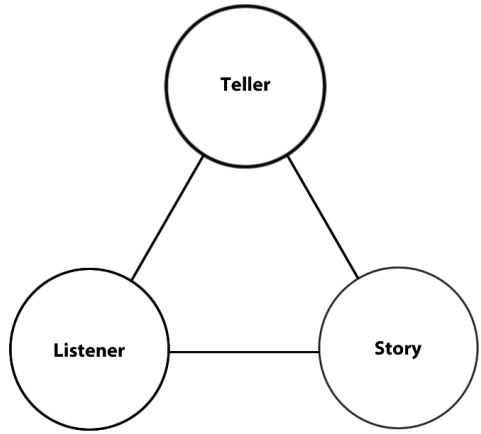


'Yes, yes I think so,' says Robbie.

'When I was thinking about this, I considered using it to show other types of storytelling, or things like stand-up comedy,' I say. 'How about in performance storytelling for example? Could we use a variation on the diagram to represent that?'

'That's easy,' states Lindsey, taking a drink. 'The teller is at the top. If it's a performance piece then the emphasis is on the performer, so they have to be at the top.'

'Ok.' I draw a new version of the circles in the corner of the page.



Performance Telling

'Let's think about other uses of storytelling,' suggests Lindsey. 'What about in education? Robbie? Sheila?'

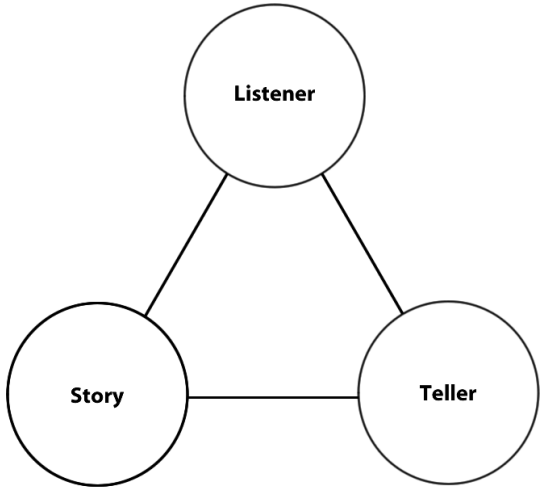
'Hmm. Well, I think in schools the listener is most important,' answers Robbie, who does a lot of work with very young children, singing, rhymes and telling stories.

'Yes, that's right. I would definitely agree with that,' says Sheila. 'The children are the focus. That's certainly what I feel anyway when I'm telling stories to the wee ones in the nursery.'

'Ok, that's interesting.' I jot it down.

'Right. And I think in business applications the listener is the most important again,' says Lindsey. 'Cos you're trying to engage them, get them thinking about the story and how it applies to them and how it translates to a context important to them. To get them to think around the story.' Lindsey is always looking for ways to apply storytelling in her work as a communications manager.

I hastily scribble another version of the diagram for business application.



Business and education

'And then there's therapy, you know, the use of storytelling as a healing tool,' says Robbie.

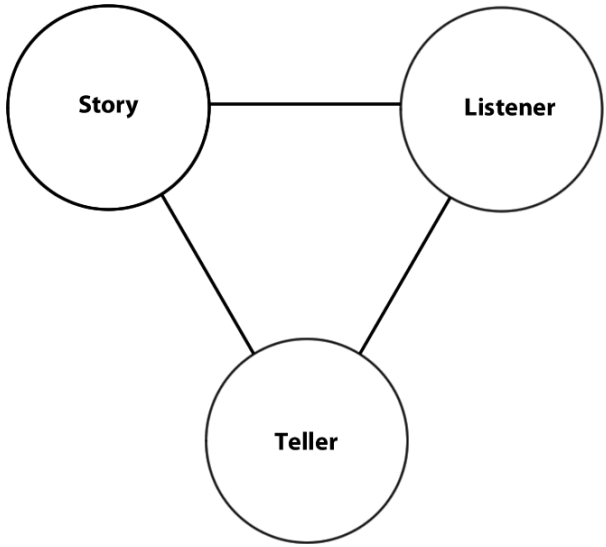
There is a slight pause in the conversation as everyone thinks about it.

'Well, the teller's the least important,' says Owen.

'Yes,' agrees Robbie. 'But the listener and the story itself are both very important.'

'So, what about if the triangle was, you know, turned upside down?' suggests Sheila.

'Like this?' I draw it again.



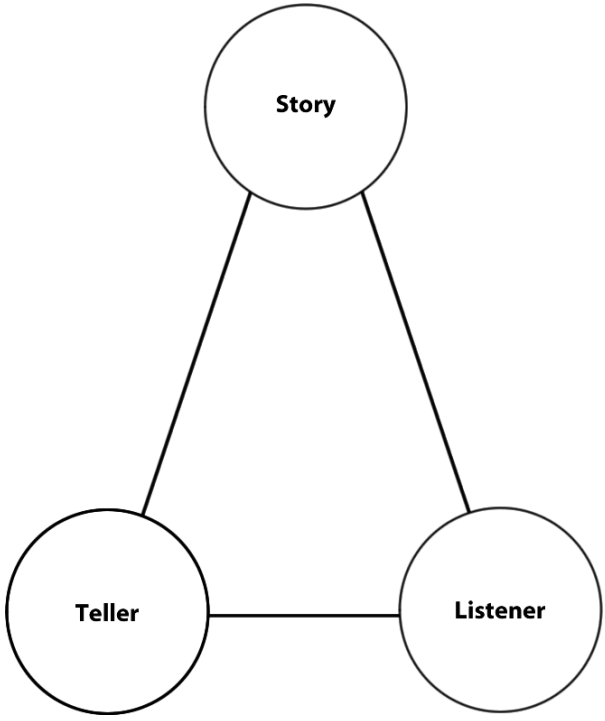
Everyone nods.

'And it would alter slightly depending on the type of story being told too,' reflects Owen.

'How do you mean?' I ask.

'Well, I was thinking of epic myths, where the story is particularly important. You know, it's the story you're trying to propagate. So maybe the gap between the teller and the listener might be bigger, like the drawing might be stretched.'

I draw again. 'Ah, ok, I see. So it would be something like this?'



'Yeah, that's right.'

'Ok.' I think fleetingly about the variations this notation could take to represent different story genres as well as the applications of stories.

Lindsey speaks again. 'And comedy, as you mentioned before, it's definitely always a performance. Like the *Electric Tales* thing we saw at the Storytelling Centre. You could tell straight away which ones were the comedians, compared to the storytellers.'

The *Electric Tales* show was a collaboration between an Edinburgh comedy club and the Scottish Storytelling Centre, both of whom hosted an evening of six acts, three being comedians and the other three being storytellers without being revealed until the end which was which. About seven of us from the Blether group went along to the Storytelling Centre event, which was compèred by a comedian. As Lindsey said, it was instantly obvious who the storytellers were, indicated by the more measured pace and delivery as much as by the content and structure.

The conversation shifts into a discussion about the *Electric Tales* evening. As the talk moves away from my simplistic diagrams I let it drift past me, more than content with the richness this half an hour discussion has offered on the nature of the storytelling triad.

As I reflect back on the conversation, I can't help but feel that I have unwittingly succumbed to the romantic, idealistic notion of the autonomy of stories. As much as the thought of stories having an independent existence appeals to me, I can find no real support for the idea, either within the group or in literature. Whilst there is no denying the connected, recurrent themes of stories, I realise I have been captivated by a variation on the 'grand unified story' quest I disparaged earlier, perhaps due to my rediscovery of the joy of folk and fairy tales. Reluctantly, I am forced to afford the concept the same short shrift I have given other deterministic models. (See chapter 2.6, and Bridge: *What is New Media?*)

What is blindingly clear, however, is the fundamental significance of the fragile connection between story, teller and listener. I am reminded of the Armenian folktale ending, 'three apples dropped from heaven', one for the teller, one for the listener and one for the one who gives heed (Avakian, 1987). These relationships are crucial to the live telling and, whilst I recognised their importance, it was incredibly beneficial for this to be validated by storytellers through the live discussion session. What I did not anticipate was the usefulness and flexibility of the original 'story-triad' diagram in mapping out the dynamics between the three components. The variations produced (and represented throughout the dialogue) tended towards two ends, the top of the diagram indicating higher importance, and the amount of overlap or space between the circles representing closer or more separate connections.

Although the original diagram was developed and intended only as a discussion aid, it could, once stripped of notational inconsistencies and subject to further investigation, be utilised to represent the differing forms of storytelling practices and classifications, focusing on the live dynamics of telling.

As described in the preceding pages, the range of diagrams developed over a live conversation with a small set of tellers. Additional validation of the diagrams, especially as they apply to a range of storytelling applications would be needed to extend the model's scope. As it stands, it repre-

sents the live nature of telling—the need for presence of both listener and teller. As subsequent chapters (and chapter 9 in particular) explore, the nature of storytelling relies on more than simply the live element.

The dynamic varies depending on the social context. Obviously other elements are at play. For example a performance telling at an evening event after a meal and wine may be more informal and relaxed than a more formal setting. The model does not currently represent this. For example, the implicit *y*-axis of increasing importance produces a flexible diagram, but could potentially be expanded by adding an *x*-axis to take account of other social and contextual factors such as time, location and local cultural practice. These factors could be summarised into two key elements, environment and culture.

In addition, it may be helpful to consider the model in other situations, such as book readings and poetry recitals, which share some of the live attributes of storytelling.

7.2 Visual Imagination

As we have seen, the dynamics of live storytelling rely on the relationship between tale, teller and listener. But what happens when successful storytelling occurs? I have cited my own (somewhat fleeting) experiences as a teller, existing in the duality between the worlds of the story and the physical present. The transportation which storytelling can create requires a mental act on the part of the teller and listener. Imagination is engaged, often resulting in mental imagery. Tensions exist between tellers regarding the use of props and visual aids, do they frustrate imagining abilities or pro-vide a hook on which to hang mental images? The connections between imagination, mental images and visual stimulus are explored in the following section.

Importance of imagination & visuals

For me, the images I see in my head when I am listening to or telling a story are the very crux of storytelling. It is what gives storytelling its split personality. Storytelling is a collective, group activity, but it is also intensely personal. My envisaging of a tale is not the same as anyone else's.

Donald Smith, director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, told me how the essence of storytelling simply relies on what human beings carry with them as people, their language and non-verbal communication skills, visual imaginations and memory functions. He explained, 'There can't be storytelling until I am getting it, until I am getting the story, until I can see what's happening, or feel what's happening or be part of the story happening.'

This need to see, or feel a story ties in with the importance of the interplay between story, teller and listener as the previous dialogue section showed. Another storyteller, Judy, illustrated how a teller can bridge the two worlds of story and physical, by indicating where objects are placed in both environments. She described telling a spooky story about a haunted, ruined kirk.

> 'When you tell that story and there's nothing,' Judy says, referring to props or technology, 'then you've got all of these children, and adults, but you've got them, and they're all sat—' Judy leans forward in her chair, adopting a look of wonderment, hands poised in front of her. 'And you know,' she says, sitting still, moving only her eyes to the right and back again, 'this "thing", I place it slightly behind them,' Judy motions to the right hand side, 'or to the side, and when I go-' She peers to the right, looking at the imaginary object. 'And they're all looking like this. You've got kids going—' Judy drops her jaw open in mock amazement. 'And if they were watching something else, I mean, where does that all go?'

Donald notes the connection between visual imagery and memory. When I ask him about how visual aids or technology can impact upon storytelling, he points out that storytellers have always used visual patterns.

> Storytellers from the beginning have used visual patterns, one of the major ones was the sky. It was the pattern of the constellations. Masses of early cultures used that as an aide-memoiré for understanding seasonal change, but also that was the map of stories, you know, and they created stories around that. Well that's a visual thing isn't it? It's a living, changing, visual thing and the landscape was the other one,

> the relationship. And all the oldest stories, when you really dig into it, are about the landscape or about why the landscape's a particular shape and form.

I am reminded of Benjamin's *storyteller* archetypes, traditionally embodied as 'the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman', their aims to understand not report, 'sink[ing] the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again.' (1999, p. 84 & p. 91)

The other obvious use of memory and visual aids can be found in ancient Greek rhetoric teaching. Students were taught to richly visualise a building with rooms, and objects in each room. Each room and object, its position and attributes, acted as mnemonic loci. This classical technique of memorising depending heavily on visual maps and powerful visuals (Yates, 1966).

Whilst this need to intensively remember information and logical arguments is not found in today's society, the use of powerful visual imagery is present not only in live storytelling but also in the preparation of stories. Over the last three or four years I have attended several storytelling workshops, aimed at novice tellers and in helping them to learn stories. Almost without exception, they have all included some form of image mapping technique, ranging from story maps (telling the entire tale in one 'frame'), storyboarding, emotion or mood maps (an abstract drawing of a story based on emotions), and physically walking or guiding someone through the story environment. In fact, I have subsequently used some of these techniques when running story-based workshops for design students.

When learning stories myself I tend to write down the bare bones in bullet point form and then spend some time imagining my characters and their environment, picturing their clothes, the way they walk, their hair, their expressions and so on.

I think Jess inspired me, her descriptions of the characters she tells, and the in-depth way she knows them is incredible. She really sees her characters and loves the story. After telling me the story of the Pharaoh and the old traveller man, she told me, 'I just see that old man and I just see the pharaoh and I can see the wee pharaoh and them all going in their journey to the other world...I can honestly say I get lost in that environment, I've known that story for years and years and years. I absolutely love it. I never ever dull manging (telling) it. I always see the character and all the friends

and even the woman that braided pearly beads in his hair with her narrow fingers and the arthritic, thin man with one eye who polished his gold bangles and rings. I can see in my mind everyone because each person is as important as the next.'

7.3 'Why has nobody ever told me about ways of storymaking?'

Russell sits opposite me, buzzing with energy. He arrived into the library room like a whirlwind, dropping his cycle helmet near the door, having cycled across Edinburgh to meet me at the Scottish Storytelling Centre. When I ask him how he got started in storytelling, Russell recounts a workshop he attended serendipitously in Glasgow some twelve years or so ago. He speaks very quickly, faster than usual, thoughts and words running into each other in their haste to get out.

'It was me and three teachers who were off and Matthew (name changed), and it just blew my mind away.'Cos he did stuff that was about storymaking and, you know, for example it was like, "Here's a sandcastle—we've built a sandcastle. There are four of you, there are four turrets, there are four flags. What's your flag like?" And so I had to, er, you know, say my flag was whatever, and Matthew continued to question.' Russell pauses.

'And that was part of story construction where there was visualisation and it became very clear that you know, you also get plot as well as-as just what a thing looks like, what it means. And I suppose I came away from that thinking, why has nobody ever told me before about ways of storymaking?'

This sandcastle was the start for Russell. It reminds me of my introduction to storytelling (as recounted in the *Prologue*). Sobol (1999) similarly describes these kind of 'conversion experiences', in particular at the early NAPPS festivals where a 'cultic atmosphere was generated partly by design and partly by a kind of unconscious collaboration of human agents with intangible forces'. (1999, p. 12)

Despite being a Church of Scotland minister, storytelling was not taught as part of his training. As he describes it I get a bit confused, not quite sure

whether the sandcastle was real or imaginary but it becomes clear that the castle was simply a powerful visualisation for the group.

'And I just loved the traditional tales as well as this idea of storymaking,' Russell continues. 'What was fascinating er, was I remember speaking to Matthew about how powerful it had been to construct this visual scene, and, I remember his dismissive comment. You know, "Aw it didnae matter to me. It was your story," you know.'

Since then, Russell has used storymaking techniques in lots of situations, including in drug reduction units as a prison chaplain, and can now understand Matthew's comment. Working with lots of different stories, stories for the day, or that session, that are made up on the spot, which are important at the time, become difficult to remember later on, as a facilitator.

'I didn't remember the stories, 'cos each month I was doing a different thing. I think when you're helping people in storymaking you don't remember the particular things you're-you're working on, but-but the people who are involved and bringing a lot of themselves into that "make" do remember and can remember.'

I recall the storymaking session Russell did with Blether Tay-gither one month. Although I have now forgotten much of the plot I can still see the old, medieval castle and banqueting hall, replete with all its wondrous inhabitants. The generous group nature of storymaking (and storytelling) seems to appeal to Russell, in a way which soon becomes apparent when you meet him. Russell has a wonderful embracing way of talking. He hosted the very first Blether Tay-gither and managed to imbue it with a sense of warmth despite the formal, somewhat austere setting of a brilliantly white lecture theatre. Having met Russell several times since then, including in his role as chair of the Scottish Storytelling Forum, I have noted this quality time and time again—the need to share and the ability to respond positively to whatever story nugget has been shared.

'It's a phenomenal thing, you know, the power of imagination and visualisation. I think these are the key things. It's unlocking people's imagination, and through realising that within themselves they've got lots of strands of story and they can bring these strands into a story maker. But er, I think the power for a lot of people is in the visualisation, in actually keying in and taking them into an imaginary world, which they, you know, you could actually see,' Russell says.

Russell told me about how he uses visual imagery both in his sermons and to recall stories.

'Powerful thing for me, and this was the the-the real revelation for me, is as a minister of the church, I could not recite to you the Lord's prayer without making a mistake. I don't know any poems, I don't know the verse of a single song. I might manage a hymn verse but certainly not two. And yet, you know, a half hour story, isn't a problem because it exists more in that I see it. Just as I could tell you what happened on my bike as I cycled from Silver Knowles to here and you know, one or two of the things that I saw, and er, a story's like, it unpacks, it unfolds, and you don't need exact words, you just need to describe you know.' Russell laughs, the distinctive sound reverberating around the room.

'Is that how you remember stories? Through that kind of visual link?' I ask, smiling.

'Yeah, very much that visual. I think other people have got different, you know, are maybe more mnemonics, other people go for rhythm, you know, and these things are important. That doesn't work for me. For me, it is actually seeing the thing and therefore telling because you've seen it.'

Russell's words resonate with me. Learning stories by mnemonics or rhythm seems like too much hard work for something which should be fun. As a child I struggled to remember by rote, nursery rhymes proving impossible for me to learn. Even today, the thought of standing up and reciting something like 'Humpty Dumpty' fills me with horror. Telling a story, by comparison, would be easy.

The use of images to remember stories is not by any means unique. Michael told me how he sees stories. A lot of the stories he tells are his own creations, which he generally only writes down after they have been tried out as a live story.

'I see the whole story,' he said. 'I see it, and the story is complete. Ok? Last year I was in Russia and I went to this place called the Silver River, and it was utterly beautiful. And when we got to the river we stopped, we just kinda just stopped because there was no boat... And just when we had parked the car there was a railway track and the railway track became filled by a train. A railway carriage just came then and filled the whole place. There was no horizon, there was no nothing there. And these goats came and the goats were wild and they started to clamber up onto the

railway carriage. And I thought, "This is great!" Imagine if these six goats went into this train, and the train took off and the goats were going their holidays. They were going to the seaside, or the mountains, or some adventure. And maybe the ticket collector, as we've seen today coming up and down this train, would come and ask, "Where is your ticket? Where is this? Where is that?" And the goats would hide in the toilet, or hide under the tables, or hide in the luggage rack and they would be playing at "Hide and Goat", you see like this. Trying to get a place because they have no ticket and more than no ticket, they have no money. But they know where they are going. So, the story just came like this.'

Similarly, Lindsey, who predominantly works with storystorming (not terribly dissimilar from Russell's storymaking) builds up visual images of the story characters and landscapes as the story progresses. 'I like to have characters to work with 'cos I'm a very visual person, so when you give me characters and a context I'm busy putting together a landscape in my head. So that's why I'm usually looking for a couple of characters to work with, but when I say a context, some kind of background I can put the characters in and then you just never know what else you're going to thrown at.'

Sylvia, who makes up her own stories as well as telling traditional folk tales, also uses images to build up stories. She has used this approach since she was a child, producing 'narrative with figures and landscapes.'

The only real exception I have found to some kind of visual aid or imagery is with a Blether Tay-gither storyteller, Senga. Senga does not have a visual memory, she has an aural memory.

'I remember you saying before that you don't think you've got a visual memory, you've got an aural memory. Could you expand upon that? I'm a very visual person so it's difficult for me to imagine!' I ask her.

'Well, I can understand that. Because I didn't really realise until I went to college that people actually saw pictures, because I thought they were speaking figuratively, you know. So I don't have—I'm not a visual person —so I don't have visual pictures. And that doesn't mean to say I don't have mind pictures which is different.'

'What's a mind picture then?' I ask, slightly confused.

'I don't know but it's not visual, you know. I mean it's not that I can't match colours because I can. I do that very well, but I don't actually see it and I don't actually see the people, but I think that it is,' Senga pauses.

'It's mind images, images. And they can be oral images or they can be, you know, smells or anything, but you know, there's something that I can access but it's not through pictures.'

Senga is a very accomplished and experienced teller, so it is obvious that, whilst perhaps the norm, visual imagery is not essential to processing and telling stories effectively.

Despite the general skew towards visual images in learning stories, many of the tellers I know use aural and oral forms to learn their tales, often incorporating technology. Sheila, another Blether member, favours an aural approach to learning stories. I ask her if she draws any pictures to help her in remembering stories.

'Only in my head,' she answers, 'I have a visual picture in my head but I don't put anything on paper and I don't write things down. I think that's what went wrong that last time.' Sheila laughs. The previous Blether meeting she started to tell a story but had to stop halfway through as it disappeared. Instead, she told a different tale, wonderfully well. Sheila normally always records herself reading a story and then plays it back to absorb the tale.

''Cos I hadn't done it that way,' she says, referring to recorded versions. 'I'd only done it by looking at the pictures and looking at the book and it hadn't gone in. And it showed myself that I can't learn a story that way. I've got to hear it first.'

7.4 Visual Aids & Props

The examples given so far show not only how important imagination is to the telling of a story but also its use in learning stories. Something which is debated however, is the degree of props and visual aids used in telling. Without props, the argument goes, imagination is free, able to imagine whatever the teller is saying, with props, the listener is given a clue or suggestion to inform their imaginary world. Generally, it is felt that young children benefit from props to focus on whilst older children and adults do not need any. The key is the ability to translate the story images from the teller to the listener, whether it be through words or aided by physical artefacts.

As Michael told me, story frees the imagination;

> 'I did the story of the butterfly. The story of the butterfly is we let the child make the pattern of the butterfly and then colour it in. And there is no wrong butterfly, because there is no wrong imagination. And if I say to anybody in an audience, and as I'll say tomorrow to three or four thousand medical students who are coming to Dundee from all over the world, let's talk about the rabbit. And they will all see the rabbit. Whether the rabbit is standing or sitting or tap-dancing, I don't know. And neither do they, because I haven't told them that he's wearing a grey hat that's tilted at an angle and there's a feather there and then, each person will see a different rabbit with a hat and a feather.
>
> …'And I thought, you know, that's the power of imagination, that story frees. That was there, like Michelangelo said about sculptures, that he had the—the sculpture was there and he just threw away the bits. He just chipped away, chipped away until he released the sculpture from the stone. And that's what storytelling does with the imagination.'

As an initial point of contact for the Dundee storytelling group, I receive emails from teachers and organisers looking for storytellers and I have found that often, 'storytelling' is misinterpreted by the general public to mean 'story reading', that is, reading an illustrated book to children, for example in a library or school situation. Storytellers are keen, however, to distinctly delineate themselves from story readers. Sheila explained some of the key differences between the two.

'Do you think there's a difference in reactions between reading a story out of a book and telling it?' I ask.

'I personally think yes, there's a big difference,' Sheila replies. 'There's a lot of benefits to telling a story rather than reading a story. You've got the eye contact for a start, you don't have the barrier of a book. You don't get, "I can't see", which you do when you've got a book.' Sheila laughs. 'There's always somebody who says they can't see because they're focussing on the book, they're not focussing on you.'

'What, you mean they can't see the book or they can't see you?' I ask.

'Yeh, they can't see the book. They're thinking, "Oh, I can't see!" I mean they can, but because they're focussing on the book they're thinking they

can't see because somebody might be sitting in front of them. But you get the eye contact and you can see their expressions and you can gauge how they're feeling, and as I said before you can, you know, if somebody's looking upset you can sort of say, "Well, it's alright," and you can change it a wee bit. Or you can see the ones that are maybe getting a bit fidgety, you can draw them in by saying, "Isn't that right?'" Sheila laughs. 'So, there's a lot of benefits to telling the story, and, I think it's encouraging them to make pictures in their head, to use their imagination more. If they've got a set picture on the page then that's what they're focussing on and that's what they're thinking about it. Whereas they make up, use their own imagination, make up their own pictures when you're telling the story.'

Senga has a similar opinion to Sheila regarding reading. She tells me that when introducing a book to children she would always try to tell the story first to 'let the children make their own pictures,' before showing them an illustrated version. She explains to me that this is because 'it's very important that that kind of imagination is stimulated and not curtailed by visuals.'

These views echo that of Bettelheim, and Dundes (1991), who claimed that illustrated storybooks are 'distracting rather than helpful', diverting 'from the learning process rather than foster[ing] it.'(1978, p. 59)

Often storytellers use a prop for telling to small children, for example a soft toy, or a box filled with multi-coloured ribbons for a story about a rainbow fairy. A quick visual can be useful in bridging culture gaps.

Jess told me a wonderful example of not only the power of storytelling, but of props, or in this case, a puppet. Jess readily admits that she is no puppeteer but, on this occasion she used 'Fluff' to great effect.

> 'You just sit there and I'll go and get Fluff. I'll show you what I do sometimes.' Jess leaves the sitting room, and I wait expectantly, camera still rolling.
>
> 'I was invited to tell stories to primary school children in one of western islands. I recall this wee dilly was by choice, mute.' I struggle to hear Jess' words, but as I twist round in the chair I see her slowly make her way back into the room. Before her walks a fluffy puppet.
>
> 'See this wiry legged vivid green toy, it cost 99p. Well I remember that day when, with Fluff tucked inside my bag, I walked into the

classroom. The teacher had told me earlier about the wee lassie who refused to speak because she's what is referred to as "a selective mute.'"

"'There's somebody in this classroom," I said looking around, "who's a wee bit shy." Gently I groped inside my bag and pulled out Fluff. Fixing the control strings between my fingers I pulled his head upwards with a big-eyed stare to my ear as if the puppet was asking me a question. I answered Fluff who looked up at me and I expect, to the kinchen, with questioning eyes. I pulled the head strings together. They were two oval shaped black eyes and may have had that querying effect then I chose my words very carefully and said, "What is it Fluff? I don't know who it is. Does anybody know who's too shy to speak in here?" The teacher's sitting away in the corner as the kinchen were all pointing at this wee girl, you see. So Fluff went right over to her you know and he just plonked him-self right down beside her on the desk.

'Unwinding the strings from my fammels (hands) I just left him there and said, "Would you look after him, he's a pet but can be a wee pest too." Now this wee dilly who refused to talk ran her tiny fingers over the puppet lying limp by her arm. I sat down in a cushioned chair and told a story. After I'd finished I asked the bairns to paint pictures that the story had conjured up in their heads. My silent wee dilly without any prompting drew a picture filled with the characters from the tale. She also drew a running burn from top to bottom, and all the way up the side of the burn there was this wee puppet and a hand guiding it through the story. On the reverse of the drawing, she wrote down questions, not for me or for her teacher but for Fluff.

"'My God", I thought, "here's this wee dilly communicating with a cheap toy from a Blackpool store."

'So I said to her, "Will I leave Fluff with you?" And she looked at me, and I was just wanting that one word but she just shook her head. Then I said to her, "Aw well, alright then. He'll miss you though. Anyway what was your name again?" "I'm Emma." And the teacher's mouth dropped, and she looked at me and she just went, "Oh!"'

Jess covers her mouth with her hands.

'The teacher was unstoppable as she ran out of the door, to the staffroom to tell everyone. I got a letter from the mother to say that Emma

had been speaking about Fluff. All I did was go into a school and meet a wee lassie called Emma who was a selective mute for whatever reason. But that's one of the most special memories I have and another path for storytellers to travel on. Emma was lovely, calm and in control just simply decided to be silent.

'But somewhere in her silence she saw in those cloth eyes and green fluffy material a form of communicating in school. Maybe deep down, storytellers don't grow into adults at least not when telling and sharing. Perhaps I took a gamble that day, I don't know, I'm only too grateful everything had a happy ending and isn't that what storytelling is all about—a happy ending.

'Duncan Williamson and I had a long conversation about this at a meeting we had. It was in Kirkcaldy. And we had workshops all day and one of the questions was about props. And Duncan had said, "No, no, no, they're not necessary." And I said to him, "You know, Duncan, I think in certain cases it does no harm." He says, "They don't have any relevance whatsoever to the story," and I answered, "But there are stories within stories. You know, we've got to communicate to everybody, especially children." He disagreed with me, and oh! He wandered away in a huff. Donald Smith who'd brought up the subject of props said, "What your idea of props?" I said, "Anything at all."

'When I tell Death in a Nut, which is a story Duncan gave life to years ago, I take a walnut with me in my pocket and at the right time I take it out and I say, "see this, a walnut, now what is it doing lying among broken shells and stones, here on the tide line?" Always being aware that my listeners could come from inner cities and never come across a shoreline, walnuts or come to think of it cows, sheep or pigs. So you've got to have something to show them, and I think if a child sees a thing, it can relate that to the story in question and will bring the story alive, to the kinchen. So, in their place, I think props are necessary. They're not everybody's thing but each to his own. As an oralist, I shouldn't be saying that, but I'm also a believer in the unexpected and if props work, then, yeah, use then. Why not?'

Jess' anecdote and advice suggest that whatever helps you tell the story, you should use it. That advice seems to be the key. The way a story is told is

unique to each individual, as is each telling. Donald took this point of view when I asked him about the appropriateness of using visual aids.

> …The only rule in storytelling is, does it make the story work better for that telling?…I work, myself, by the negative principle if you like. I would say, "Do I need that?" Or, could that potentially come between the sharing of the story and the imagining of the story in the listeners' minds?...It's different with young kids. I think that they really like a visual element, I think that really helps. I'm not saying that it's necessary but I think it really helps. I think in other circumstances people have become so elaborate…You can see people getting so tied up in the physical props that it's actually detracting from communicating in the physical story.

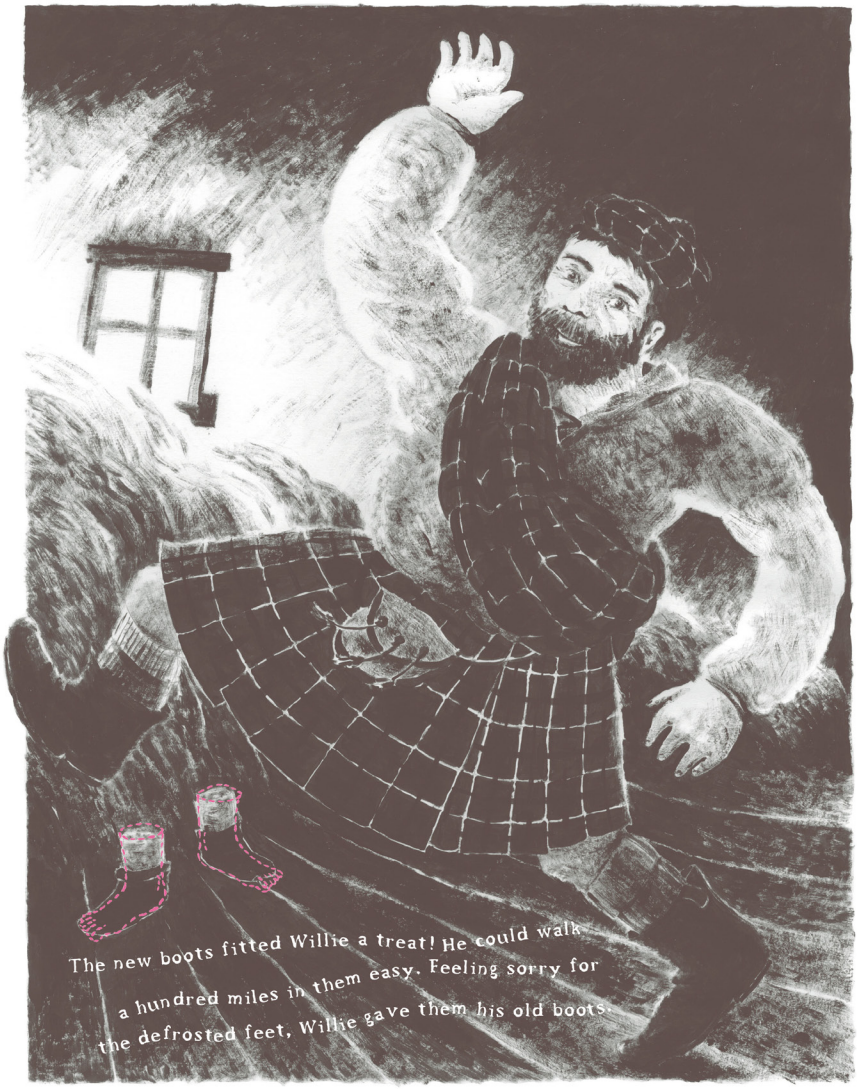
Visual imagination and mental imagery is crucial in storytelling, yet storytelling is still a visual art form. The presence of the teller in front of the listener is an integral aspect. In my own experience as a listener, I have noted that not only is the use of props a subjective and personal choice, but that body language and gesture varies between tellers. For me, this has a bearing on how the mental images are invoked. But just as the telling style is unique, so too the listener preference varies. For my own part, I tend to favour understated storytelling, with a relatively stationary teller, as I find I can then generate stronger visuals. During the Gypsy Arts Festival in Edinburgh in 2008 there was a range of storytelling events at the Centre to celebrate the late Duncan Williamson. One of the tellers I saw, a highly acclaimed English storyteller, told a Jack tale. He told the story very well, commandingly, and used his body to tell the tale, moving around the stage, ensuring that every audience member was one hundred percent aware of what was going on in the story at every point. Yet when I think back on the telling, as much as I can remember it, I see not the young boy Jack, nor the devil blacksmith, but the teller himself, moving across the stage.

On attending a different evening at the same festival I saw another English teller. She sat on a chair on the stage, moving very little, just her hands. The story was a selkie tale, and when I recollect that telling, I cannot see the teller's face, nor would I recognise her in the street if I saw her now, but I can still see the seal, the boat and the traveller woman. I can visualise the

complete story, including its emotional content. This is not to say that the woman was a better storyteller than the man I heard two nights later, but it is simply proves that storytelling is an intensely personal and subjective art. It is not prescriptive. It is unique.

Notes

1. Festival at the Edge: A storytelling festival in Shropshire, England, which takes place every year over a weekend in July, and showcases a range of local and international storytelling performances and workshops. http://www.festivalattheedge.org [Accessed 9 February 2010.]
2. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDNQ5tByoWg [Accessed 9 February 2010]
3. Official site for the giant puppet man of Scotland. http://members.bigmanwalking.com. [Accessed 3 March 2010.]



The new boots fitted Willie a treat! He could walk a hundred miles in them easy. Feeling sorry for the defrosted feet, Willie gave them his old boots.

Chapter 8
Ethos of Storytelling

As the previous chapters have shown, *storytelling* is not simply a performance or mechanism. It is embedded in the local, in the live: the immediate *context*. It is defined by nuances, and constrained by the misconception that is it solely for children.

This chapter explores some of the more formalised infrastructure supporting storytelling in Scotland, including the Edinburgh-based Scottish Storytelling Centre and the development of their national directory of tellers. The professionalisation of storytelling is a contentious topic, but can be somewhat simplistically resolved by referring to traditional archetypes of hearth and court (Haggarty, 1996), or hearth and laird's hall. Similarly, ownership of stories and authenticity is the subject of some debate and will be considered in the following pages.

8.1 Perception of storytelling & Archetypes

Storytelling in Scotland (and it would seem, more generally too) fights against the notion that stories are purely for children, serving educational, moralistic or entertainment purposes. This is perpetuated by mass media Disney-'standarized' fairytales (Zipes, 1997, p. 69). However this trend began much earlier when tales were being committed to print. Zipes explains that 'both radio and film continued the literary tradition of separating the fairy tale for children from that of adults' (1997, p. 5).

> I think technology has an effect on storytelling in that people have videos and DVDs and they play a story over and over again, but they play the story over with visuals. So that if you are telling Aladdin…

> or any of the Disney versions of fairytales then you will get back the Disney version, and of course that has many cultural parts to it. For instance, dealing with women—women in Disney cartoons are definitely a stereotype. I mean they're tall, their waist is reduced to nothing, they are very well endowed, they've got very long legs and you know, they look the same no matter which culture they come from.
>
> And the other thing is that a lot of them are very knowing, in that they want to put in jokes for adults and they don't understand the culture of the story—because it's all American. You know, Hercules for instance is very difficult to watch if you know the actual story, but if this is your first story, or first seeing of it, then you think that's what it is.
>
> Senga

As Senga notes, there is another side to the divide Zipes claims where filmmakers include jokes for adults. Yet the perception remains that storytelling is seen as a pastime for children (for example the student quoted in the case study described in part III, chapter 12.3).

Therefore unsurprisingly, in keeping with this perception that children are the primary audience, many storytellers seek work in schools, libraries and nurseries, sadly bolstering the notion that once childhood is past, fairytales and folktales should be put away. Warner corroborates this experience:

> Because the teller struggles to locate and find an audience who will receive the stories' message with favour, children emerge as hearers, established in printed literature as the special audience by the mid-eighteenth century: they are still, in the lucrative market of mass entertainment that draws on fairytale material. (1994, p. 409)

Understanding storytelling as an art form is further confused by the use of the term in reference to novels, authors, films, directors and music. Joseph Sobol notes this use, and compares it with the accolade bestowed upon storytellers in times gone by:

> For months after the release of The Crying Game, one often heard the director referred to as 'a master storyteller' and the film described as 'a brilliant piece of storytelling.' Even when a particular work exists in a highly wrought technological frame, as a film so obviously does, critics tend to invoke the image of the storyteller whenever the frame recedes from view and we feel as if we are hearing the story through a human voice.
>
> (Sobol, 1999, p. 27)

In my role as secretary for Blether Tay-gither, I deal with requests for storytellers, passing them on to the wider group as required. Yet even here, in a group promoted as oral storytelling, often story-reading is anticipated. When I asked Robbie about the differences between story-telling and story-reading, she explained that she tends to use a book with very young children, to provide a focal point for them to concentrate on. She then gave a very clear illustration of the perception of storytelling as a book-based activity;

> 'I was at a nursery in Keltie, or Fife anyway, in the summer, and I told a story without a book—but they knew that I was coming to tell them stories—and I'd introduced myself and I can't remember if I said, "Now I'm going to tell you a story about—" or if I just went into it. But it was about, 'One Day in the Jungle' and I have a wee bag with all different animals in it, they're just wee pictures. And I pulled out an animal, and we start off with a tiny butterfly and it's, "One day in the jungle," and it sneezes. So I get them all to sneeze, "Atchoo!" and there was a table there so I was blu-tacking it on the table, just on the edge. And then the next day, when the butterfly sneezed a bigger animal came and said, "Bless you, Butterfly," and the next day it sneezed a louder sneeze and so it goes on. The animals get bigger and the sneezes get louder until you get to the elephant and, you know, they're hysterical by this time!
>
> 'So,' Robbie continues, 'I had thought that went down well because the children seemed to enjoy it, and then I told them another story.

> I did Goldilocks and the Three Bears and I'd asked for comments. I take a comments book with me, and the children went away back to do whatever they were doing, and I got my book back. And it said, "The children asked if that was a story?" Because they hadn't understood the concept that I was telling them a story. I think they were expecting a book. So it's quite important to say, "This is a story of One Day in the Jungle," or, "I would like to tell you the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Because if they're not used to being told a story, they will always look for the book. So that was a very valuable learning experience for me.' Robbie pauses.
>
> 'So when I went back the next time I made sure—"This is a story of…"' She pronounces each word deliberately, before laughing again.
>
> 'But they seemed to enjoy it. It's just their perception—they don't know. You have to tell them that we're going to tell a story. And you know, I've been asked, "Where's your book?" Or, "Where's your storybook? Where's your story?" and I say, "It's in here."' Robbie taps the side of her head.

Obviously then current, external perceptions of storytellers in Scotland are vague, seen as relating only to children and largely tied in with schools and education, strengthening the literary connection of story reading. But what about other ways of looking at storytelling? There are two main archetypes, or models of storytelling, the *hearth* and the *court* (Haggarty, 1996). Haggarty defines the *Hearthside Tradition* as altruistic, community based and generally adopted by amateurs. By comparison, the *Professional Tradition* is defined as providing 'financial or life-supporting gain.' Both strands have roots in tradition, whether through connection with the local community and for the love of stories (hearth) or through more bardic, paid work at court, market or in a laird's hall (professional).

Despite this apparently traditional divide in telling styles, there is still concern regarding the professionalisation of the art form. Though the creation of a national network of registered storytellers has been a success in Scotland, especially in terms of raising national awareness of storytelling, Jack Zipes warns of storytelling's commoditisation, claiming that 'they [storytellers in UK and US] have also endangered storytelling by professionalizing it and turning it into just another commodity that can be mar-

keted for specific occasions.' (Zipes in Wilson, 2006, xvii)

With professionalism comes higher expectations. But just as the types of tellers may be split into hearth and court, so too the reactions to storytelling is split into, 'I could do this,' and, 'I could never do this.' The problem soon arises as to how one markets themselves as a 'professional' storyteller? In England the SfS (Society for Storytelling) allows tellers to market themselves as professional for a fee to the society, although this is set to change[1]. A similar fee-based approaches exists in the USA (NSN – National Storytelling Network). In Scotland, membership of the directory is free, but includes a system of peer reviews and mentoring, and usually takes some time to complete. Neither approach is without problems, and the issues of the Scottish system will be examined in the next section.

Other than the two established archetypes of hearth and court, Walter Benjamin categorised storytellers into the seaman and the tiller (Benjamin and Arendt, 1999). That is, the storyteller connected to the land and community, who told local stories to local people, and the traveller, who collected and told exotic tales from far-flung lands. Sobol, describing the state of storytelling in the States, splits tellers into two similar archetypes;

> …the roster can be divided between those who identify themselves with a place and a particular set of local traditions and those cosmopolitan storytellers whose appeal is in their journeying through the breadth of world folklore, conscientiously gathering strands of spiritual, ethical, or political meaning to resonate with the needs of their cosmopolitan audience.
>
> (Sobol, 1999, p. 32)

Wilson quotes Kay Stone as categorising tellers into three groups, 'the traditional storyteller, the modern urban storyteller (such as the classroom teacher or librarian) and the neo-traditional storyteller (such as many contemporary professional storytellers)'. Wilson suggests a threefold classification system, dividing along the lines of back-ground, modus operandi and purpose (2006, p. 17).

Generally speaking, 'traditional' tellers are deemed to be those who learn the craft of storytelling in their natural cultural setting, like Benjamin's 'genuine' storytelling, e.g. travellers such as Betsy Whyte and Duncan Wil-

liamson. 'Contemporary' tellers are those who tell in more artificial, formal settings, with emphasis on the platform or performance of the teller. Ryan discusses the idea of performance and identity in terms of personas storytellers adopt, a concept he dubs 'mega-identities'.

> We put too much effort into the story*teller* performance and not enough in the story*telling* performance. Tremendous energy goes into creating the persona of professional storyteller, often attendant with eccentricities setting it off from normal individuals and other artists. It becomes what I refer to as a mega-identity, a lifestyle choice that is meant to be a shorthand to tell people "this person is a storyteller" but that also can support or inflate ego.
>
> (Ryan, 2008)

This debate or issue does not often arise in Scotland, which may be due to the lower numbers of tellers entering the profession from a performance background. As my empirical work has shown, many tellers turn to, or discover, storytelling through the workplace—as teachers, librarians, musicians or through the environmental sector. Consequently the vast majority of storytelling takes place in applied settings rather than as performance pieces in their own right, supported by the flourishing 'hearth-side' club scene, which promotes the *telling* and not the *teller*.

The ultimate archetype of storytelling is connected with the dynamics of live telling, as discussed in the previous chapter;

> The archetype of the storyteller is an image of heightened presence-but a presence built on a paradox, since it arises from the gift of conferring absence. The storyteller's presence embodies a concentration of physical, emotional, mental, and unconscious faculties, through which an audience is transported away from the physical plane.
>
> (Sobol, 1999, p. 35)

Finding our 'Hearthside' – Wednesday 30th September 2009

I am still awestruck by how incredible Sunday's storytelling event was. It was a special evening of nautical tales (part of Tay Roots festival) on board the HM Frigate Unicorn in Dundee.

There was a fierce wind blowing, and the old warship creaked and groaned as she moved gently in the water. Soft light and laughter seeped under the door of the captain's cabin onto the deserted main deck; inside the cabin it was warm and cosy. As it grew dark outside it was just possible to spot the rippling black water through the small, lamp-adorned windows.

It was a magical place and the stories cast their own spells too. We were moved from laughter to tears and back again. There was even a haunting ode to a dolphin, accompanied by clarsach, which lifted the hairs on the back of your neck.

It was undoubtedly the best venue we've ever had the pleasure of telling tales in. Sadly, it was probably a one-off event, there's no way we could afford to hire the Unicorn by ourselves.

Although we've been established as a group for some time now, the greatest challenge has always been in finding the right location. We are constrained by cost (it needs to be free) and location (must be accessible by public transport). We don't want it to be a pub (in case it excludes people who don't drink), don't want to be in the University (sets an 'academic' tone), or a church (religious associations). This tends to narrow the options down considerably!

I didn't realise at first how important the physical space can be. Whilst it's true that story-telling can happen anywhere and any time, some places are naturally more conducive to sharing stories than others, especially for nurturing novice tellers. Our first ever 'Blether' was held in the university, in an austere, state of the art, blindingly-white lecture theatre. It's ideal for lecturing and throwing video or PowerPoint onto the walls but it felt wrong for the group. Since that inauspicious start, we bounced around Dundee for some time, trying various rooms in the University and local pubs before settling on a steady oscillation between the Botanic Gar-dens (actually part of the uni but far enough away to feel neutral) and the café area of Dundee Rep Theatre.

Neither place is 100% ideal, the Botanics is a bit isolated geographically whilst the Rep can be noisy. But beggars can't be choosers.

I met an architecture student a year or so ago (in my 'gatekeeper' role) to give him some advice regarding the design of a theoretical storytelling house, situated on a remote Orkney isle. It made me wonder what an ideal space for storytelling could be. I visualised a low-ceilinged room, with unique, community created decorations, such as weavings. I could see a crackling fire providing a focal point, with the whole space somehow exuding a warm, friendly feel.

Wistful thinking aside, it would seem that Blether Tay-gither's venue problems are not unique. I'm aware of at least three other clubs who are having, or who have had, problems finding venues. Accessibility, location and cost seem to be the biggest factors. The search continues...

8.2 Support Structures for Storytelling in Scotland

The previous chapters and anecdotes have shown some of the community atmosphere within Blether Tay-gither, but it is important to reflect on the situation and strengths of Blether in the overall context of the structure of storytelling in Scotland. As mentioned previously, support from the Scottish Storytelling Centre, specifically in the guise of Donald and Russell, was instrumental in the setting up the Dundee club. Having recognised this support, Blether is now hoping to propagate success and encouragement to newly established clubs.

Donald Smith's *Storytelling Scotland: A Nation in Narrative* provides a detailed examination of the background of oral tradition in Scotland. Crossing from storytelling, ballads and the written word, Smith discusses regional historical aspects of narrative. Contemporary storytelling in Scotland draws heavily on the '[twentieth century] "re-discovery" of living oral traditions in the lingering Hebridean Gaeltacht and amongst the Scottish Travellers' (Smith, 2001, p. 121). This flies somewhat in the face of Walter Benjamin's claim that '[f]amiliar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force.' (Benjamin and Arendt, 1999) Following the folklore collectors, including Calum Maclean and Hamish Henderson, and the development of the School of Scottish Studies (1951), Smith places contemporary storytelling as a latter subset of the folk revival. Only later did it gain recognition in its own right

(largely due to the publication of Traveller stories) and in 1989 the first International Storytelling Festival was held in Edinburgh. Subsequently the Guid Crack Club[2] was founded, shortly followed by the Scottish Storytelling Forum in 1992. The Forum committee meets about five times a year. Amongst other purposes (such as contributing to the development of FEST, the Federation for European Storytelling) the Forum has overall responsibility for directory applications and the annual Scottish International Storytelling Festival. The Scottish Storytelling Centre was set up in Edinburgh in 1997, and in 2006 the new Netherbow building was opened, cementing storytelling's place in Scottish culture.

A registered charity, the Centre serves as a dedicated focus for storytelling events, training and resources. The Forum runs the accreditation scheme for professional storytellers in Scotland; once on the registered list, it can become slightly easier for tellers to obtain paid work. The Centre passes queries to tellers on the directory, although which tellers are recommended for each job is at the discretion of the Centre employees. (Neither the selected tellers nor the Centre receive any money for this connection service.) In addition, registered tellers are eligible to apply for the Scottish Arts Council bursaries, and are listed on the Live Literature funding database[3].

Unlike similar directories in England and USA, there is no charge for becoming a directory member. The process however, requires several stages of peer mentoring and reviews, and can take up to three years to complete. The directory is in many ways a victim of its own success, originally it was much quicker to become accredited, but with around twenty applications in process at any one time, the logistics of setting up applicants with mentors becomes greater.

In its ideal form, the process works well, with burgeoning tellers finding their 'artist-dragons' in the mentoring system. Dan Yashinsky describes the dragon as a 'formidable and uncompromising teacher who stands in the middle of your path. To get past these artist-dragons, you must contend with their passion, their discipline, and their fierce understanding of the art of storytelling.' (Yashinsky, 2008)

In a less favourable light, it can be a frustrating, tedious process; setting up meetings and reviews with mentors and assessors can be particularly difficult. Nevertheless, the ideal of an apprenticeship-inspired scheme

is surely far more preferable than a simple payment for advertising. The Centre's directory ensures storytellers reach a certain standard in terms of skills and experience. Storytelling can only be learnt through the act of actually practicing it. The Scottish Storytelling Forum's approach of mentoring and shadowing experienced tellers is admirable. The directory has been discussed several times by the Dundee Storytelling Group; we need to develop our own clear protocol to deal with requests for tellers which favour the local group members (not all of whom are on the national directory) without favouring any subset of the club (for example, the steering group). In a bid to deal with these kind of requests, GAS (Grampian Association of Storytellers, based in Aberdeen) have set up their own club directory.

Although named the *Scottish* Storytelling Centre and Forum, it is often deemed to be Edinburgh-centric. Certainly, the Centre itself naturally suffers from this, being physically located on the Royal Mile in Scotland's capital city. The majority of Forum members are based in Edinburgh although there is some representation from other areas. The Forum itself is almost shrouded in mystery. I have attended several of the meetings over the past year, thanks to a committed Blether Tay-gither member securing an invite for me, but out with Blether, an established storytelling club member recently told me that she had not heard of the Forum, and had no idea what role they played. In my foray into the storytelling world I have also heard the occasional grumble that local or regional storytellers are passed over in favour of Edinburgh-based ones. As secretary of Blether Tay-gither, I am aware of the difficulties in dealing with requests, and recognise that you can't please all of the people all of the time.

Aside from the Centre and Forum, Glasgow represents its own storytelling hub. As we have seen, the Village Storytelling Centre in Pollok, Glasgow, led several projects with particular focus on intergenerational and multi-ethnic groups, empowering asylum seekers and recent immigrants with literacy and storytelling sessions; forging working relationships in the community. In 2008 the director of the centre, Rachel Smillie, became the first Glasgow Storytelling Development Officer, an appointment created to give storytelling a higher profile in the city.

Another recent addition to the storytelling scene in Scotland is a collaboration between the Scottish Storytelling Centre and Newbattle Abbey College (seven miles outside Edinburgh). Newbattle now offers an

SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) course in *Contemporary Storytelling*, consisting of three main sections, *Theory and Practice*, *Practical Skills*, and a *project* set in the student's work environment[4]. It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the storytelling community, but it will undoubtedly help to raise the profile of storytelling in general.

So, whilst Walter Benjamin argued in 1936 that storytelling has seen its day, in Scotland storytelling is forming new communities who gather to hear and share stories, whether it be in clubs or schools, performance events or festivals. Apart from the Edinburgh group, storytelling clubs are becoming more popular across the country, and include the Better Crack Club and Even Better Crack Club (for families) in Glasgow, GAS in Aberdeen (Grampian Association of Storytellers) and Blether Tay-gither (Dundee Storytelling Group) as well as others in the Borders and Inverness. The role of these clubs is invaluable, providing a floor to practice telling tales in non-threatening environments, peer support for novice and experienced tellers alike, and showcases a range of storytelling styles, thereby encouraging tellers to develop their own voice.

Aside from simply entertainment, tellers use the clubs to test out stories, and seek advice on how best to tell.

> 'The Glasgow storytelling club, that's my stamping ground. If it works ok there I'll work on it more. If it doesn't work too well there, forget it!' Frances laughs. 'So, the club's you know, testing ground very often.'

Similarly, in response to being asked why she goes to storytelling clubs, Lindsey told me she goes to Blether Tay-gither meet up with tellers, discover new stories and to practise telling stories. Lindsey is part of Edinburgh's Botanic Gardens storytelling group, Talking Trees, as well as Blether Tay-Gither.

> 'That's certainly why I go,' she says. 'But I do like ours because we have those chats, like when someone brought in the puppets and said, "I don't know what to call it," and I loved that. But the bigger ones, the er, Crack clubs—it's storyteller after storyteller. You miss that added value and I'd hate to see us go that way.' Lindsey pauses. 'And I guess, certainly what I'm going to be looking for from the group is, I'm needing

> a bit of guidance about how to take it further and where to go with it. I haven't asked for it yet, but, I think when I do, they'll be there.'

Whilst storytelling is by its nature a social activity, tellers are often isolated, going by themselves to gigs, e.g. in schools. It is a rare enough event when an organisation can afford to hire a single teller, far less two or more. The clubs provide a social network for tellers to share not only stories but to socialise, as Russell picked up on,

> 'Storytelling is a social thing. And it is possible to start off in storytelling and tell stories in certain situations and be *the* storyteller, but that can be very lonely, I think. I think that's what's important about clubs and about festivals and about things that we're trying to develop in the storytelling forum like peer tutoring. Or even just six folk gathering together storytellers to give more than just a, "That's very good," but actually a wee bit of critique and encouragement and pointers. All of that is because storytelling is an art, and if you want to grow in that art you actually need to be given a little bit of encouragement, first of all, in a kind of platform, you know, to tell and to tell among appreciative folk who are mebbe into that community of storytelling. And then mebbe a wee bit beyond that, to actually have storytelling friends where we can help each other a wee bit to develop our art and to, you know, just have that little bit of critique. So I think the gatherings are important.'

8.3 Genuine Storytelling & Ownership

On reviewing literature surrounding storytelling, it quickly becomes apparent that there is considerable debate and discourse in England surrounding the themes of 'genuine' or traditional storytelling versus contemporary or 'revival' storytelling (Wilson, 2006, Heywood, 2004). In my experience of storytelling in Scotland, I have not found this to be an issue of contention. Instead, the concept of 'revival' storytelling is received with incredulity (see chapter 9.3). As Smith (2001) notes, contemporary storytelling in Scotland was led by the traveller community, and influenced by Gaelic culture. In that sense, storytelling never stopped, but it has obvi-

ously undergone some kind of resurgence, heralded by the success of the Scottish Storytelling Centre and Forum. It is worth noting some of the perceived issues between tradition and contemporary telling here.

Walter Benjamin deems 'genuine' storytelling to be that of the rural, authentic, spontaneous events of story sharing, borne out of work practices. Relating the 'words, soul, eye, and hand…storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work.' (Benjamin and Arendt, 1999, p. 107) The close connection between craft practices and storytelling emphasises the traditional folk art domain. Whilst in the main, these practices have receded from modern society, the oft quoted Scottish traveller saying of 'eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart' mirrors some of Benjamin's sentiments.

Jack Zipes also makes use of the 'genuine storytelling' concept, yet coherent definitions seem elusive (Zipes, 2000). Is genuine storytelling defined by the purpose or type of event (e.g. artificially constructed festivals) or does it reflect upon the teller itself? Zipes seems to correlate 'genuineness' with authenticity or truth. Genuine storytelling appears to be a synonym for successful telling, with the story forming a bond between teller and listener, ephemeral and potentially non-repeatable. He argues:

> The genuine storyteller is a skeptic, a doubter, whose wisdom is conveyed by the realization that there may be no wisdom or ethics to be passed on. It is by challenging the truth value of the very words that the storyteller speaks that he or she becomes genuine and that wisdom may be conveyed.
>
> (Zipes, 2000, p. 135)

Ryan (2008) considers the uses and meaning of genuine storytelling too, comparing Zipes' definition with Celati's view. Celati, he claims, regards professional versus genuine storytelling as a class divide, with professional tellers satisfying 'ego-gratification and empowerment: participation in this kind of storytelling as a teller, listener or event organizer asserts one's cultural or intellectual superiority over non-participants.'

As Ryan rightly asserts, there is the danger of creating sterile, artificial environments for telling, which depart from the intended purpose of rais-

ing the profile of story. One of the main concerns here is the focus on story*teller*, not story as a shared experience, and the potential cult of celebrity storytellers. Heywood (2004) notes that traditional storytellers are not concerned with the reasons why they tell, they simply tell. Likewise, he points out that Sobol's detailed account of the US storytelling revival misses a key aim of the movement—"the telling of stories". Perhaps due to the smaller geography of Scotland, most tellers that I have come across stress the importance of the stories rather than the teller. This is buoyed up by the types of events that take place; there is rarely a physical stage or platform, instead listeners or participants surround the teller (though somewhat ironically the Scottish Storytelling Centre boasts a theatre and stage).

Traditional versus Contemporary

The debate between what defines traditional storytellers and contemporary storytellers is closely linked to the notions of genuine storytelling outlined above. Once again, in Scotland this debate is rarely voiced but is useful in situating Scottish storytelling in a wider context.

The issue of tradition (dubbed a romantic, rose-tinted ideal) arose from the revival storytelling movement that took place in the 1960s in England, Wales (Wilson, 2006) and the US (see Sobol (1999) for comprehensive outline of revival in US). It seems to stem largely from expectations of what a storyteller should be and do, in essence what a storyteller is.

The themes of genuine, traditional and contemporary telling and tellers are intrinsically linked and are closely interwoven with notions of ownership and authenticity. Ryan (2006) considers the use and abuse of 'Celticity', that is, tellers adopting the persona of 'Celtic' storytellers specialising in Celtic traditions and tales. The risk of wearing 'Celticity' as an overarching shell can mean that storytellers, rather than remaining focused on story, become a slave to 'Celtic' themes, using their mega-identity as a marketing tool, and in fact negating any remaining vestige of tradition. Whilst Ryan suggests that this need to create an identity has in part arisen from a perceived lack of understanding and awareness of storytelling amongst the general public, it is clear that such fabricated personas show a lack of authenticity and respect for the stories themselves.

Ultimately however, tradition in oral culture is never static. In the case

of storytelling, tradition is characteristic of orality in its ephemeral nature, not only of content but also of style. Traditions vary between cultures as well as time frames; for one person or culture, stories should be told sparsely and seated; in others it is a more performative art. Storytelling in one form or another has always existed, but whilst having awareness of the past is important, it is also important to realise that notions of tradition are always going to be flawed.

> It is arguable that these developments involved a diminution or dilution of tradition. Certainly individuals came to claim the storytelling mantle without understanding the inherent dynamics and discipline of the art form. Traditional materials were sometimes applied without respect to their character of the integrity of their social contexts. Nonetheless, these risks were balanced by the energy of new inclusion and by the integrity of a process which enabled new kinds of interaction, as well as the development of the art form in fresh contexts. Perhaps this kind of process was always a necessary part of any living cultural tradition.
>
> (Smith, 2001, p. 168)

Consider this extract from Basso of the Western Apache's idea of description:

> A person who speaks too much – someone who describes too busily, who supplies too many details, who repeats and qualifies too many times – presumes without warrant on the right of hearers to build freely and creatively on the speaker's own depictions. (1996, p. 85)

In contrast, Ilona Lacková's retelling of the Romany fairs of her childhood the opposite is true:

> The first two days the relations would hug each other, cry in each other's arms, drink to their meeting again after such a long time—they hadn't seen each other for two months!—but the third day the calumnies started, the intrigues, the bickering, the arguing.
>
> 'Your girl is uppity, she's got a tongue like this!...Your boy is pretty

> flashy, but what your boy's got in his head, my boy's got in his backside!...' Every exchange of opinion was accompanied by illustrative gestures that sometimes crossed over into dance figures and acrobatic movements—and again, it was all for show. The most ingenious actresses were Marca and no-nose Pipka from Sabinor. They were an indispensable part of every fair and people always waited until they appeared and played out their duel of word-images and dance figures such as not even the best poet and the most inventive choreographer in the word could think up.
>
> (Lacková and Hübschmannová, 2000, p. 52)

Successful storytelling must balance respect and awareness of tradition and story along with demonstrating the unique style of the teller. It is often said amongst the Scottish tellers that you must give the story your own voice; your own twist on the tale. Sheila Stewart, the great ballad singer and storyteller, has this quality as Donald Smith notes:

> When Sheila Stewart of Blairgowrie tells stories she taps a vein of fantasy and rich dramatic humour which belongs to her family tradition, but she also employs a verve and gusto—a force of personality and language—which is entirely her own: there is tradition and the individual talent. (2001, p. 156)

Whose stories are they?

Authenticity, genuineness and Ryan's 'Celticity' all suggest close links with ethnicity and potentially, ownership of stories. Who do stories belong to? In Scotland, stories are shared; once told they are free to be passed on by others. Generally either at the start or end of the story the teller gives a bit of background about the tale, for example its setting, cultural context or where they got it from. This is more often the case if the story was passed on from another person, rather than adapted from written material. Although cultural styles of telling vary and in-depth knowledge of the culture is not necessarily present, most Scottish tellers feel comfortable telling stories from around the world. This is undoubtedly due in part to the open nature of story-sharing applied to local stories.

Lindsey gave me the classic view of the ownership of stories. By and large, this is the general impression I have found amongst storytellers.

> I think when you're telling it, the story becomes yours. It stops being yours as soon as you stop telling the story. It becomes everybody else's, or, as you're telling it, it becomes everybody else's story. Particularly the spontaneous stuff because it's definitely not my story, it's everybody's story because we're all coming together to make it and see what happens with it. And it goes away being all of our stories.

Whilst the case seems fairly clear cut regarding folk tales or fairytales which have been immortalised in print, stories created by the teller (not simply adapted from literary sources) and retold is a bit more complex and depends on the individual teller. Heckler (1996) described the positive reaction from a literary author who was honoured for tellers to share her stories, even joking that she should pay them to tell her stories.

Russell told me about an occasion when he was involved in running a children's storytelling club in Glasgow. A guest teller came along to the club one day and asked the children what stories they had been listening to and working on. Through their discussion with the children, it turned out that they had been working on a story by that day's guest, without Russell remembering where he had got the story from.

> Russell laughs. 'I had told it without attribution. And that's the way it works isn't it!' Russell laughs again.
>
> 'So was he upset that it was-' I ask, leaving my question half unsaid.
>
> 'No, he wasn't upset, no. He found it quite spooky, and actually probably quite chilling I think. Because Fred is a – Fred creates his own unique stories and I think er—'
>
> 'Ah,' I say, understanding better now. Within the circle of story-tellers I regularly communicate with, it is less common to tell your own stories.
>
> '—and I think, you know,' Russell continues, 'for him to hear one of his own stories being retold, by these kids and then to see pictures of it! It's a spooky thing, you know, there's a sense in which when a story is yours, you own it, and you know, somebody else telling it, it's quite

> a private thing, it's quite a precious thing.'
>
> 'Do you consider stories to be everyone's?' I ask.
>
> 'Yeah,' he replies. 'I think you should always try and attribute, you know, and try and make sure you've got reasonable permission that you're telling somebody else's story. In the States it's crazy. I was over there for two months, a second study leave opportunity I had, to investigate storytelling in the States…What became very clear in the States is, that if you weren't a Jew you couldn't tell a Jewish story, if you weren't Afro-American you couldn't tell an Afro-American story, if you weren't Slovak you couldn't tell a Slovak story, and so on. And so, erm, people in the states had got into an awful lot of just personal storytelling, which a lot of us were hearing this over here in Scotland and finding it very boring and self-indulgent. You know, that all these American storytellers came and told them all about themselves.' Russell laughs. 'But then I realised why, because they really weren't allowed to tell, and so that's very sad. I think that's against the spirit that I was suggesting. Storytelling is a generous sharing art…It's a bit like a good joke. A good story or a poke of sweets, you know, you pass them round, erm, you know, from that point of view, it's not a precious thing – hopefully!'
>
> (Some names changed)

I reflect on the nature of this 'preciousness' of stories, remembering when I gave a talk on my research findings in front of a storyteller. I claimed that storytellers are not 'precious' about their stories. It was only when I was gently reprimanded and explained that stories are indeed precious and revered by tellers that I realised where the confusion lay. Stories are the currency of storytellers, like Leslie Slape's *The Tale-Teller* (2003), they are like precious stones and jewels, but only to those who understand and cherish them. My use of the word 'precious' was in the way that Russell used above, they are able to be shared, a generous gift bestowed upon the listeners; their importance and value is not diminished in the gifting.

As suggested earlier, the situation is more complex when the teller has written the story themselves. It is expected that at the least, permission would be sought first. Michael, who makes up most of the stories he tells, told me that he thought there should be some form of copyright or equiva-

lent for those who want to tell his original stories.

As Russell described in the previous page, telling a story created by you is a far more personal enterprise, the characters and plot are all of your creation. It has to be addressed on a case by case basis. I heard a terribly moving story at the 2009 Storytelling Festival in Edinburgh by a Canadian teller. It was an anecdote of her and her granny sitting up through a night time vigil at the side of a grieving widow who had lost her new-born child. At the end of her tale, there was more than one who shed a tear. Her intensely moving and personal story was very powerful, and could not, I think, be told by anyone else.

Scottish traveller and author Jess Smith tells a mixture of family anecdotes and folktales. At the start of a story I have heard her address the circle of listeners and openly encourage them to take any of her stories and tell them to others. She told me a bit more about her approach to stories,

> I see myself like a leaf on a page of a living book and I am amidst the story, carrying from one place to another, the characters inside. My joy is sharing; to me this is more important than the telling. I want people to take a story that I've given them and hopefully appreciate it by telling it themselves. If they chose to do this then I've done a good job of passing that on. If not then I've failed my listener and myself.
>
> It's in us all, we've just got to open up and share it. It's a lovely thing, not just to be able to tell a story but to share it. And to know that you're giving someone pleasure by doing that.

It is obvious the pleasure that Jess gets out of telling stories. She continues to tell me about how you can adapt stories.

> 'Get into the guts of a story, you know, find out what makes it tick, before you tell it. Gel with it. If you don't like it don't tell it. Love it. Make it your own, change it if you must but put your own stamp on it, you know. You've got a story and you've heard someone tell it, don't say, "Well I can't tell that story because it's so and so." You can be respectful and say, "I heard so and so tell this story and this is my version of it, I've adapted it, see what you think." Don't be afraid to play around with these stories, you know, to experiment with them. That's

> what they're all about, that's what makes them joyous—that you can put your own stamp on it. Sharing stories and handing them down from one generation to another doesn't mean to say that you've got to tell it exactly the same as it is. Tell it as you think, as you see it, because no two eyes see or no two ears hear the same story. They will find their own wee bit in it. You know, if you're not happy with Snow white lying under that glass box, put her somewhere else. Put her up a tree. Turn the dwarves into crows. They don't have to be people, they don't have to be little men. Let them be crows.'

Jess mentioned 'respect' and that seems to be critical. Respect for the stories and their tellers can go a long way in smoothing over the contentious issues.

The telling of stories from different cultures exists throughout the UK, with varying levels of respect and sensitivity. Arguments exist for sharing world stories, as Wilson states:

> …contemporary storytellers would no doubt see themselves in the role of promoting intercultural understanding and awareness, and assisting in the fight to preserve minority and traditional cultures in the face of globalization. In addition, the argument exists that there is a world of difference between, say, a white English storyteller telling a Maori story (where the story is appropriated by an outside culture and reinterpreted by that culture for its own ends) and a Maori storyteller telling that same story in England (where the story and its interpretation remains under the ownership of the original culture). Alternatively, it could also be said that whilst the former blatantly commodifies the story for Western consumption, the latter more subtly commodifies both story and storyteller.
>
> (Wilson, 2006, p. 32)

In the US, due to intense debate of story ownership, most of the stories told are anecdotal, or from their own cultural background. This is due to issues of copyright and in-appropriately 'stealing' of stories from cultures (First Nations in particular), and has been impacted by the professionalisation and commoditisation of storytelling. Barre Toelken (1996) argues that

Native stories should not be told lightly. Specifically referring to his own experience with Navajo tales, he claims that the 'fullest possible appreciation of the story in its cultural setting should be more important to us [storytellers] than the practical (and dare I say "selfish"?) concern for extending our "ethnic" repertoire.' (1996, p. 58) Bruchac (1996) voices similar concerns, citing a lack of understanding of place and 'about the responsibilities involved in telling them or the knowledge and permission which are often required in Native cultures before one tells the stories of another.' (1996, p. 93) There is a difference in this case between sharing the story to an audience or individual and gifting the story to be retold.

The final word on this topic falls to Ruth Sawyer, reiterating the Scottish point of view I have come across in my research:

> Every traditional storyteller I have heard—and I have gone into many countries to find them—has shown above everything else that intense urge to share with others what has already moved him deeply…Not a clever sharing of the mind alone, but rather a sharing of heart and spirit: I think storytelling must do this if it is to endure.
>
> (Sawyer, 1997, p. 28)

Here it is the *intention* behind the telling which is important, leading to meaningful storytelling with respect and awareness.

8.4 Conclusions

As this section has shown, storytelling in Scotland, led by the Scottish Storytelling Forum and Centre is a fairly democratic art form. Although tensions obviously exist at some level, it is in general a cohesive group with good levels of support for its members. Whilst previous chapters have given a sense of the flavour of storytelling in Scotland, this chapter has explored the issues affecting other communities. Scotland seems to have got off lightly from some of the intense debates on tradition and ownership, perhaps due to the influence of the national storytelling institutions and the smaller physical geography, leading to closer ties between groups—story sharing is vital.

The social aspect of literacy and storytelling impacts hugely upon the

debates continuing within the storytelling community such as ownership, genuineness and tradition. Meaning in stories is held both in the story-structure and also the social occasion. If the social background is not properly understood or acknowledged then the genuineness of the storytelling experience is under threat. Therefore, intention and respect are important features. In Scotland, most tellers regularly tell stories from other cultures and this is widely accepted; the important principle here is respect for the stories and the cultures and the ability to tell stories that ring true to the teller's nature and unique style of telling. Ownership of stories is shared and open; emphasis is placed on the participative nature of storytelling. Most telling in Scotland is applied, i.e. that in schools, historical events, clubs and libraries. This fits in with the wide assumption that storytelling is solely for children, although there is increasingly a growing call for reminiscence telling with older people.

These applied forms of storytelling reinforce the fact that storytelling is not neutral, there is a purpose to it, whether to uphold society, subvert it, entertain, teach or strengthen identity.

In one form or another, stories have always been told and always will be told. The desire to hark back to a historical traditional ideal of what 'storytelling' is may be 'romantic' (Wilson, 2006), yet in context, many features of storytelling are themselves reflecting history (e.g. diversity, need for stories, education, social change, entertainment, escapism). In Scotland, the tradition of sitting round a fire telling stories is not eons ago but a generation or two at most. Many Scottish tellers lament forcibly learning English at school at the expense of their 'mither' tongue (e.g. Scots or Doric) and this informs elements of their storytelling practice. Combine this with the strong traveller tradition, and oral culture in Scotland becomes not a archaic relic but a recently obscured, if not current, aspect of culture.

Storytelling is about making the ordinary extraordinary. The crucial point here is *ordinary*, making events and situations which listeners can relate to, whether it be by the force of human nature in believable characters, or say, familiar landscapes. If stories are not relevant to current society then they must be changed or else forgotten, that is, if they do not captivate the audience and elicit the desired response then the story piece is not working. Over time, if the story no longer fulfils its purpose, its presence fades. The upshot is that the existing corpus of stories are always important to today's

society, i.e. if they do not work then they will not be retold. Donald Smith alludes to this phenomenon:

> The coherence and dynamic of the narrative itself will determine its acceptability among communities of listeners. Without such inherent narrative viability expressed in character, structure and images, a story cannot emerge and be sustained. Unless it is told and retold, and formed by such telling, the story will fade from memory.
>
> (Smith, 2001, p. 5)

Notes

1. At time of writing, the fee is set at £25 per year. "In due course some conditions will be applied to people wishing to enter the directory and these will be announced as soon as practically possible." See the SfS website: http://sfs.org.uk/storyteller/directory_information. Accessed 13 January 2010.
2. The Guid Crack Club is a monthly storytelling evening, with special guests and themes. It takes place in the fairly small upstairs room of the Waverley Pub just off the Royal Mile, and is invariably packed out each month. It is always a lively atmosphere, with story following story following song.
3. The Live Literature funding scheme, run by the Scottish Book Trust, provides subsidies for organisations (including schools) to host authors or storytellers for readings, workshops and residencies. http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning-and-inclusion/sbt-learning-and-inclusion-projects/live-literature. Accessed 15 February 2010.
4. http://www.newbattleabbeycollege.ac.uk/short-courses/contemporary-storytellng. Accessed 3 March 2010.

Chapter 9
Attributes of Telling

It should now be clear that storytelling in the context of this thesis refers to the culture and ethos of story sharing by a person to one or more others in a live setting, face to face—'eye-to-eye, mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart'.

> The storyteller is clearly the medium of the story, the facilitator of its altered reality; but since in an ideal storytelling event the actual story takes place as much in the group imagination and responses as in the storyteller's words, the entire listening group is the true storytelling medium.
>
> (Sobol, 1999, p. 36)

In order to identify and discuss connections between this oral storytelling medium and digital media, it is necessary to create a more clearly articulated definition of 'storytelling', complete with a set of attributes to describe it. This is no mean feat and whatever definition is offered is bound to be contentious. In an attempt to address these issues, the definition offered is generated from a narrow focus. It is derived from my study group, i.e. largely from observations of Blether Tay-gither and though more generalised traits are described, the definition has been validated by a number of storytellers within this local context. The definition does not dwell on the content of the tales, but on the form, including that of environment and ethos. Whilst the previous sections have demonstrated the general storytelling ethos in Scotland, this section consolidates the experiential writings into a condensed list.

9.1 What is Storytelling? A One-Sentence Definition

'Storytelling' is used to describe all kinds of narrative, from films to plays and photography, novels to architecture, and even in the design process of computer systems. One of the problems this generates is a lack of understanding of what actually happens at 'storytelling' clubs or events, the word *storytelling* being rendered meaningless due to its vast overuse. But even in oral storysharing, one person's experience may not be another's and so naturally definitions vary (Ryan, 2008). Localised cultural environments explain this in part. Some simplification may be made by using the term 'traditional storytelling', thus excluding some forms of narrative such as film, however the phrase can add more ambiguity about the nature of today's storytelling, dubbing it an irrelevant, archaic pastime. It is generally accepted that storytelling claims its lineage from oral culture (and certainly this was the lens applied in chapter 2 for contextual purposes) but the global storytelling 'revival' is a much more recent movement originating in the 1960s and 1970s, as documented by Wilson and Sobol (Wilson, 2006, Sobol, 1999). As we have seen, a lot of storytelling in Scotland seeks to align itself with the Gaelic ceilidh tradition and also draws heavily on traveller culture for both format and material. This is borne up by the type of small scale events held in cafes, pubs and village community centres.

A simple, yet still fluid, description of storytelling in Scotland can be made relatively easily. Although storytelling can be divided into several categories, whether it be storytelling in clubs (such as the Guid Crack club in Edinburgh and Dundee's Blether Tay-gither), more structured events (e.g. in schools and community centres) or performance storytelling (e.g. platform telling at the Scottish Storytelling Centre theatre), there are certain similarities between them which can be drawn out.

Storytelling is the coming together of small groups of people to share and hear stories. The stories are told orally, without rote learning from a script and generally without the use of props (though this depends on the style of the storyteller). These gatherings may be in the form of a performance, with only one storyteller, but more often it is in the form of a traditional ceilidh, where everyone shares a story, song or joke. Even in more formal platform events it is not unknown for audience members to be invited onstage to share a piece (often a ballad). This is where the term 'sto-

rytelling' can be-come more complicated, for often the mix of forms includes music, in the form of ballads or folk songs and sometimes riddles and poetry.

Although the atmosphere is invariably informal, there is a sense of mutual respect and etiquette. Interruptions during the story do not occur unless requested by the teller (for example in the case of spontaneous storytelling or 'story storming'[1]) though laughter, exclamations of horror etc. are welcomed. Sometimes, a telling will spark the memory of a similar story and so natural themes can emerge amongst groups of tellers.

So then, what can be said of 'storytelling'?

> In essence, storytelling can be considered as a means of sharing knowledge: an artistic form of direct communication.

9.2 Alternative Definitions of Storytelling

Having presented an initial wide scoped one-sentence definition of storytelling above, it is useful to consider alternative definitions of storytelling as suggested by storytelling groups and associations. The Scottish Storytelling Centre's website provides the following:

> Stories are all around us—in newspapers, novels, on TV and the Web. They are part of the way in which we understand our environment and experience and come to terms with them. True storytelling happens when the story is told person to person, live, without print or technology.
>
> Storytelling is a unique human skill shared between people and ordinary conversation is full of anecdotes and real life stories. It is one of our oldest artforms. It brings words and the world to life together, stimulates the imagination, and builds a sense of community between tellers and listeners…The emphasis in traditional storytelling is as much on the telling as the story. Stories are recreated by the teller at each telling and passed on through generations.[2]

Similarly, the Crick Crack Club, a London-based storytelling group explains (in a more defensive, academic tone):

We take storytelling to refer very specifically to the oral re-telling of traditional tales. 'Tell', 'talk' and 'tale' are terms from the vocabulary surrounding orality and the spoken word. The spoken word is something far, far older than writing and is guided by very different principles from those established by literacy. When the Crick Crack Club speaks of 'storytelling' we are not referring to the reading of texts aloud, nor to the recitation of memorised text. There are no tangible 'scripts' in storytelling and because of this, our work needs to be clearly differentiated from the work of writers, poets, authors and actors. These professionals often refer to their 'live' activities as storytelling, because the term is understandably more convenient than more semantically accurate phrases such as 'reading writing aloud' or 'reciting text'.

From our perspective, storytelling is the re-telling of a narrative through the spoken word for a specific audience in a specific context. It is an immediate, living, 'mantic' art demanding the re-creation of the story for each new audience through an improvisation. This creative act of improvisation can accommodate all the myriad variables of an event, ranging from the mood of the teller to the number, age and social composition of the audience; the décor, temperature and acoustics of the venue; the weather outside; events in the news; the time of day or season, etc.

The inclusion of the physical co-presence of an audience clearly distinguishes the work of a storyteller from that of a writer. It is a communal, rather than solitary, art. The act of storytelling can only occur when a story, storyteller and audience come together. The relationship between the storyteller and the audience is constantly reaffirmed and renewed by what is known as, 'Crick? Crack!'—a call and response. The call and response is by no means always verbalised as directly as this, but is nevertheless subtly maintained in terms of interrogative remarks and gestures that ensure the complicity of the audience in the creation of the piece. The stance of the storyteller is one of poise between two worlds—the world of the story and the 'here and now' world of the event. The storyteller is a mediator of ancestral imagination.[3]

The NSA (National Storytelling Association) in the United States says:

> At its core, storytelling is the art of using language, vocalization, and/or physical movement and gesture to reveal the elements and images of a story to a specific, live audience. A central, unique aspect of storytelling is its reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to complete and co-create the story.
> *What is a telling?*
>
> It is the live, person-to-person oral and physical presentation of a story to an audience. "Telling" involves direct contact between teller and listener. It mandates the direct presentation of the story by the teller. The teller's role is to prepare and present the necessary language, vocalization, and physicality to effectively and efficiently communicate the images of a story. The listener's role is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events—the reality—of the story in their mind based on the performance by the teller, and on their past experiences, beliefs, and understandings. The completed story happens in the mind of the listener, unique and personal for each individual.
>
> 1. Storytelling is an interactive performance art form. Direct interaction between the teller and audience is an essential element of the storytelling experience. An audience responds to the teller's words and actions. The teller uses this generally non-verbal feedback to immediately, spontaneously, and improvisationally adjust the tones, wording, and pace of the story to better meet the needs of the audience.
> 2. Storytelling is, by design, a co-creative process. Storytelling audiences do not passively receive a story from the teller, as a viewer receives and records the content of a television program or motion picture. The teller provides no visual images, no stage set, and generally, no costumes related to story characters or historic period. Listeners create these images based on the performer's telling and on their own experiences and beliefs.
> 3. Storytelling is, by its nature, personal, interpretive, and uniquely human. Storytelling passes on the essence of who we are. Stories

are a prime vehicle for assessing and interpreting events, experiences, and concepts from minor moments of daily life to the grand nature of the human condition. It is an intrinsic and basic form of human communication. More than any other form of communication, the telling of stories in an integral and essential part of the human experience.

4. Storytelling is a process, a medium for sharing, interpreting, offering the content and meaning of a story to an audience. Because storytelling is spontaneous and experiential, and thus a dynamic interaction between teller and listener, it is far more difficult to describe than is the script and camera directions of a movie, or the lines and stage direction notes of a play. Storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience.[4]

The final group definition of storytelling for consideration is below. This is from the recently formed Federation of European Storytelling (FEST) and was drafted up in second half of 2009.

> Storytelling is understood to be the live oral telling of stories, engaging directly with listeners to create a shared experience of storytelling. While welcoming and affirming technological means of communication, the primary experience is in real time and person to person.[5]

The similarities between these definitions are striking. A few commonalities are listed below:

Live/oral telling

- Live oral telling of stories. (FEST)
- True storytelling happens when the story is told person to person, live. (SSC)
- It is an immediate, living, 'mantic' art demanding the re-creation of the story for each new audience through an improvisation. (CCC)
- It is the live, person-to-person oral and physical presentation of a story to an audience. (NSA)

Person-person

- Engaging directly with listeners. (FEST)
- Storytelling is a unique human skill shared between people. (SSC)
- 'Telling' involves direct contact between teller and listener. It mandates the direct presentation of the story by the teller. (NSA)

Unique event/telling

- The primary experience is in real time. (FEST)
- Stories are recreated by the teller at each telling. (SSC)
- The relationship between the storyteller and the audience is constantly reaffirmed and renewed by what is known as, 'Crick? Crack!' - a call and response. (CCC)
- The teller uses this generally non-verbal feedback to immediately, spontaneously, and improvisationally adjust the tones, wording, and pace of the story to better meet the needs of the audience. (NSA)

Community/sharing

- Create a shared experience of storytelling. (FEST)
- Builds a sense of community between tellers and listeners. (SSC)
- It is a communal, rather than solitary, art. The act of storytelling can only occur when a story, storyteller and audience come together. (CCC)
- Storytelling is, by design, a co-creative process. (NSA)

Old artform

- It is one of our oldest artforms. (SSC)
- The spoken word is something far, far older than writing and is guided by very different principles from those established by literacy. (CCC)

Visual imagination

- It brings words and the world to life together, stimulates the imagination. (SSC)
- The storyteller is a mediator of ancestral imagination. (CCC)
- A central, unique aspect of storytelling is its reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to complete and co-create the story. (NSA)

These commonalities provide a good starting point for a list of storytelling characteristics. The differences and omissions in the definitions however, are also interesting. For example, the Scottish Storytelling Centre acknowledges the use of 'storytelling' in everyday life referring to books, television etc., but points out that this kind of storytelling is not technology mediated. In comparison the Crick Crack Club places emphasis on lack of scripts, seeking to differentiate itself from conventional theatre and plays. Similarly, although co-creation of stories is alluded to in the Crick Crack Club's description, there is less mention of sharing and more a sense of storyteller as performer with a distinction between the teller and the audience. The NSA sidesteps some of this by referring to the audience mainly as 'listeners' and making mention of the personal, interpretative and sharing aspects of storytelling.

Finally, let us consider another three examples of storytelling definitions cited by individuals:

> Storytelling can only occur live, in the sharing of a story between its teller and the audience. Storytelling is the living dynamic between three elements—the story, the effort of its teller to breathe life into it through sound, word and gesture and the responding, influencing audience. It is an interpretative improvisation. It is Jazz. It is primordial, immediate, responsive theatre.
>
> (Haggarty, 1996)

> The practice of storytelling in general seems to me to be about connection: between storyteller and audience, storyteller and a story's source (often living people), actions and events within stories, and among stories themselves. I have found that in telling stories I have felt part of some endless, three-dimensional web of connectedness.
>
> (Leith, 2002, p. 13)

> Storytelling is a co-creative experience involving senses with an intentional storyteller and acknowledged listener(s). This definition is intended as a guideline—not to be engraved in stone—and provides an expansive view to the art form by including various styles of the art.
>
> Rachel Hedman - Blog Comment (Maxwell, 2009)

These additional definitions reinforce the characteristics drawn out from the previous definitions. Once again, we are faced with the 'liveness' of storytelling, the connection between teller, listener and tale and the uniqueness of each rendition of a tale.

9.3 Specific Storytelling Characteristics

From considering the definitions above, we have arrived at an initial set of attributes or commonalities for storytelling. To recap, they are (in no specific order):

- Live/oral telling
- Person-person
- Unique event/telling
- Community/sharing
- Old artform
- Visual imagination

Yet it seemed to me that there is more in the art of storytelling than the above list. Eager to get an insight from the local storytelling community, I asked thirteen tellers to reflect upon Wilson's characteristics of storytelling (reproduced below). This was done via email to involve a range of geographically dispersed tellers and to get individual responses. I was personally curious about tellers' reactions because some of the characteristics are rarely mentioned in Scotland, especially the emphasis on performance and the storytelling revival. I deliberately did not include any of my thoughts in the email to prevent clouding the replies. After some deliberation, I included the reference (I had considered sending a second email with the complete citation after getting the responses) as I felt that the storytellers may temper their replies if they thought I had produced the characteristics. The original email and responses are reproduced below.

Email from Debbie to Storytellers Fri, 30 Jan 2009

Hello everyone,

If you don't have time to answer this then don't worry…

I'm writing up my PhD (argh) and came across this definition of storytelling

and wondered how much you agree with it.
Any comments gratefully received (or suggestions of what to add/take away from the list).
****
Storytelling resists definition by absolutes. With this in mind, I might tentatively offer the fol-lowing indicative characteristics of storytelling:
* It has emerged as a new kind of art form since the 1960s/70s.
* In spite of its 'youth', it often lays claim to a much longer pedigree and traditionality.
* It is ultimately a performative form.
* It is centred around a solo performer or group of solo performers.
* Storytellers usually work from a repertoire, in the same way that a singer or musician may.
* Storytelling is usually low-tech in terms of light, sound, set, props and costume.
* Storytellers rarely work with a director or choreographer, but they do often choreograph themselves or prepare carefully for an event as actors do.
* The central performance dynamic is usually the vocal.
******
[Taken from Michael Wilson, Storytelling and Theatre: Contemporary Storytellers and their Art, p8]
many thanks,
Debbie

Within half an hour, the responses began filtering in. It might seem strange to correspond with a group of storytellers through email when their strength is in face to face communication, but I have found email to be very effective. Excepting when we meet for story events, email is my primary form of contacting tellers. Most of the tellers are very quick at responding to queries, whether it be 'official' Blether Tay-gither business or my research requests. Aside from conducting formalised interviews and emails, my other main way of directing discussion is through Blether meetings. I put my name into the hat, but when drawn, I offer an apology for not telling a story but suggest a discussion topic instead. Not only does this set us out from other clubs but enables everyone to contribute, whether they are telling a story or perhaps at Blether for the first time.

Date: Fri, 30 Jan 2009 13:43

Not a lot of time to reply just now as I am on my way out the door. A lot I don't agree with in the definition though (typical of me).
New kind of art form??? 60/70's? Is that 40060 BC?
But I am aware it is an extremely difficult thing to define and pin down. There will never be agreement.
Owen

Date: Fri, 30 Jan 2009 14:08

I would include the definition that storytelling is an artistic form of direct communication. I know that various forms of storytelling come into writing and films, etc, but basically it is the communication and sharing element that underpins it. (The story is told "eye to eye, mind to mind and heart to heart" (Storytelling brochure)
Sylvia

It is a sign of the importance placed upon the travelling culture that the phrase 'eye to eye, mind to mind and heart to heart' is used frequently. If I had a pound for every time I have heard that phrase…

Date: Fri, 30 Jan 2009 14:21

Hi Debbie,
I would say that oral storytelling is a performance art and the oral storyteller is a performer and should approach a telling in terms of personal staging for the targeted audience. This is a great topic for a development workshop as many tellers fall short in these skills. I have given a workshop on this topic and compared performance styles of great tellers ranging from Alice Kane who believed the focus was always the spoken word and therefore her body movement was minimalized when performing as opposed to others who put on a mini drama.
That's all the time I have.
Good luck
Philippa

It may be worth pointing out that Philippa is a storyteller bridging the gap between Canada and Scotland and so her views reflect a mix of both.

Date: Fri, 30 Jan 2009 14:50

Very quick thoughts in colour below:

****

* It has emerged as a new kind of art form since the 1960s/70s.

You know yourself storytelling has been around since the dawn of time so perhaps 'recognised as an art form' would be more accurate.

* It is centred around a solo performer or group of solo performers.

It can also involve performers working together on a story - 'team telling' to create a new piece of jargon!

* Storytellers usually work from a repertoire, in the same way that a singer or musician may.

Not surprisingly I disagree with this, it sounds very structured and limited whereas its much wider than that and far more free flowing.

* The central performance dynamic is usually the vocal.

This sentence proves the case - its about storytelling not storywriting.

There's no recognition that storytelling is done without books i.e. it's not storyreading and that it's oral not written or dramatised.

Lindsey

These comments also reflect the individual teller's style and preference for spontaneous storytelling, generating the actual story with the listeners, who become participants. At the end of each storystorm, a general winding up comment is 'Well I hope you enjoyed that story because it's your story. You all made it. Thank you.'

Date: Fri, 30 Jan 2009 20:04

Hi Debbie,

I always read with interest the doings of the Dundee group and you are frequently mentioned at the committee meetings as a thriving group…this looks like a great way to shake cobwebs from my brain…

* It has emerged as a new kind of art form since the 1960s/70s.

It is as old as life - I was inspired by storytellers from Papua New Guinea where there was no written language

If you refer to the "revival" in storytelling in the UK it was at the same time as people popularised folksongs again

*In spite of its 'youth', it often lays claim to a much longer pedigree and traditionality.
Yes, we have many tradition bearers in Scotland and not just amongst the travellers
* It is ultimately a performative form.
There are "performance" storytellers and there are storytellers who share stories and there is a big difference between them
* It is centred around a solo performer or group of solo performers.
No, it involves listeners for without them the story cannot be shared
* Storytellers usually work from a repertoire, in the same way that a singer or musician may. Yes
* Storytelling is usually low-tech in terms of light, sound, set, props and costume. Yes
* Storytellers rarely work with a director or choreographer, but they do often choreograph themselves or prepare carefully for an event as actors do.
yes- if it a performance storyteller. But otherwise, storytellers will want to understand something of their audience and the nature of the event and the stories told may not always be the stories first "planned".
* The central performance dynamic is usually the vocal.
Yes
Cheers, Judy

Date: Sat, 31 Jan 2009 22:22

Hi, a couple of comments for what they are worth.
1) storytelling may have emerged as an "art form" since then but only because it has been labelled as such since then. its existence before that was just part of life, something which happened in families and communities but perhaps without it being looked on as a "performance" so…
2) to say storytelling "lays claim" to a "much longer pedigree and traditionality" suggests that there is some doubt about this and to my mind there is not.
3) I don't know if it is always performative. I don't really see myself performing when i tell to my grandchildren at home but then I suppose it depends on your definition of performance.
The rest I don't really disagree with.
just my opinion. hope it helps. good luck.
Sheila

The response from the storytellers was close to what I expected. Their main issues with Wilson's definition centred around outrage at the suggestion that 'storytelling' was a new artform, merely laying 'claim to a much longer pedigree and traditionality'. As Wilson himself notes, the role of tradition in storytelling has a very different context in Scotland compared to England and Wales (Wilson, 2006, p. 29). Storytelling in Scotland tends to have strong nationalistic sentiment, often in the folktales themselves but certainly in the perceptions of ceilidh culture and family storytelling. None of the tellers deny the flourishing nature of storytelling, or folk culture in general, but I have never heard any of them refer to it as the 'storytelling revival', except when referring to other countries (i.e. England and USA).

The other main bone of contention with the offered characteristics was the issue of 'performance'. So much rests on definitions and connotations. 'Performance' suggests a self absorption, marking out the teller from the listeners, creating an audience to be entertained rather than stories to be shared. Yet it is obvious that there are some differences between a tale being told and normal conversation.

So, from Wilson's characteristics what can we take of relevance to Scottish storytelling and as general characteristics?

- The historical, revival claims, whilst contentious in Scotland, are not necessary to an understanding of what storytelling is or does. Experience of telling is more important.
- Performance must be recognised at some level.
- The focus is on sharing and group connections between teller and listeners.
- Granted, most tellers work from a repertoire of stories, but this does not aid us in describing generic qualities of storytelling, this is a cultural facet of telling.
- Voice is incredibly important in telling, it is the main tool.

By combining attributes from the previously discussed definitions and reflecting on Wilson's suggested characteristics, a second list of attributes can be created. When generic oral culture attributes and observations from storytelling events are also considered the following ten point list emerges:

Storytelling Characteristics (in no particular order):

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles
2. Collective memory - shared memory of stories held in storytelling communities
3. Performance - formalised event (in that is it is different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu)
4. Liveness - real-time event, not generally recorded
5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice - as a tool for characters, emotion, suspense etc.
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination - of both listener and teller
9. Connection between story, teller and listener - emotional, personal, group
10. Desire by teller and group to share stories

To validate these characteristics I asked twenty storytellers to comment on them, again using email. Once again, several tellers responded and gave me a set of suggestions and comments.

From Debbie to Storytellers, Wed, 12 Aug 2009

Hello everyone,

I've been thinking a lot about how to characterise and create a definition of storytelling that I can use in my research. I know it's always going to be a contentious issue and a lot depends on personal ideas of storytelling, but I've listed what I think below.

I would be very grateful if you could let me know any thoughts you might have about the list, good or bad. Perhaps I have missed something out, or some of the characteristics shouldn't be there?

Here goes,

Storytelling Characteristics:

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles

2. Collective memory - shared memory of stories held in storytelling communities

3. Performance - formalised event (in that is it is different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu)

4. Liveness - real-time event, not generally recorded

5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice - as a tool for characters, emotion, suspense etc
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination - of both listener and teller
9. Connection between story, teller and listener - emotional, personal, group
10. Desire by teller and group to share stories

Many thanks, Debbie

The first response was as follows.

Date: Wed, 12 Aug 2009 17:23

Hi Debbie

I have been reading an amazing book recently by Tahir Shar called In Arabian Nights. This is a magical story about the ancient tradition of storytelling. How much our society depends on these stories to give meaning to out culture. In the west we have moved so far from that 'Living in and with stories' unlike the eastern tradition in which tales are an integral part of the society's life blood. True telling is not a performance. It's a sharing of knowledge, under-standing, keys to problems, many, many clues as to how to live and be a kind, compassion-ate, considerate human etc. As I learn more I realize integrity and authenticity are integral—finding the depth of the stories, their roots, their community, the smell, touch, sounds within the tale. The Berbers believed that each of them was born with a story within their hearts that looked after them and protects them. Their task was to find that story, search for it. To look for it in everything they did…

This gives a completely different perspective on Storytelling, listening to stories, what we do with our lives etc…

All you have listed below are good and integral to delivery. But heart and soul have to be a major ingredient. Love and a sense of wishing to give.

Bearing emotions and finding stories in which the storyteller can weave her/his own experience of life within which gives the tale depth, power, and flesh on the bones..

Hope this helps and sows seeds with which to ponder and water and grow and bare fruit!

Xx Claire

As was discussed in chapter 8, authenticity and truth in storytelling is a recurrent theme and topic for discussion. It is always hard to break down something complex into a set of seemingly soulless components. Whilst I agree with the list of storytelling characteristics I recognise that something is missing, the sum is greater than the parts. Perhaps this indefinable quality can be attributed to belief or authenticity, the desire to share something more than simply stories—to pass on wisdom or enthusiasm for what the tales represent.

Date: Wed, 12 Aug 2009 17:31

Hi Debbie!
Under 1. (or perhaps 2.) you might note that stories are often international/ cross-border in character.
Also, props - small drum, rainstick, whatever, - puppets if you are Sarah! - may often be used as aids to engage the listeners. At least one storyteller I know always dresses in full and semi-obsolete Highland garb.
Eric X (Name changed)

Props in stories are another potentially contentious issue (see chapter 7). Some tellers eschew the use of any props, others use them when telling to children. I debated including props in the list but decided against it. Props are a supplementary aid to storytelling. If they are not merely supportive, then it becomes puppetry rather than storytelling. (Obviously puppetry still tells a narrative but in this context it is something different from 'storytelling.')

Date: Wed, 12 Aug 2009 18:52

Debbie,
A storyteller has to sound truthful before embarking on the oral journey
Laying foundations to every tale is paramount.
Belief in the tale and also in the teller will carry a strong sense of voice to the end.
What one must strive for is that listeners leave with the tale concreted in their mind-entertaining and enjoyable but most important of all-convincing!
Without these a story is as bland as a second rate novel with little content and less character.
Best as always, Jess

Date: Fri, 14 Aug 2009 10:44

Hi Debbie,
Nice to hear from you. I hope your research is going well. I was trying to think about what words I would use to characterise storytelling (something like - sharing, wisdom, tradition, enjoyment) and thought you had encompassed these, and more, in your list.
I do not argue that it is a 'performance' in a way but not sure if I would think of telling a story to your grandchild sitting on your knee as a formalised event. But that is just nit-picking. It is different from 'normal conversation' for sure. Can't think of an alternative word that would be any better.
All the best with completing this task. I'd be interested to see what you end up with.
Best wishes,
Jackie

Once again, the issue of 'performance' arises. I tried to be very explicit in the use of 'performance'—stating it was a 'formalised event (in that is it is different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu)'. However, there were no other comments on this. To me, a qualified 'performance' seems the appropriate word to use when describing Scottish storytelling.

Date: Fri, 14 Aug 2009 16:26

Hi Debbie,
This sounds like a great list. I would add something about connecting different times and cultures - I find that that's the real magic behind storytelling - getting a real and personal insight into how someone from the past, or from a different nationality perceives an idea or event. With other media, such as films and books, this tends to get hidden behind more prevalent cultural ideas (i.e. a film set in the past still tends to have the people acting in a very modern way, even when they try really hard not too), or they try to play down certain ideas because its too shocking or hard to understand if put visually.
I hope your studies are going well?
Anna

Many tellers share stories from different cultures and times, as Anna notes. There is some dispute about how truthfully these tales express other cul-

tures if told by someone out with the culture. The general line taken by the tellers I know is that stories should be told with sincerity and respect, therefore they feel comfortable telling stories from other lands and times by adhering to those principles. Learning about other cultures through stories is another aspect of sharing knowledge through tales.

Date: Fri, 14 Aug 2009 17:04

You seem to have summed everything up. The only other aspect to explore is "well-being". Storytelling is very effective in the field of therapy, enabling people to understand and express themselves in ways that heal (disturbed children, troubled adults, prisoners, etc). Also people can also find solutions to everyday/business, etc problems through the medium of storytelling (Laura* knows a lot about this). Also stories express shared human emotions which are echoed around the world, resulting in a remarkable number of similar tales (e.g. over 300 "Cinderella-type stories). Different but the same - we are all linked by stories. But maybe all this is already understood and covered in your description. Just a few musings! All the best.
Sylvia

(*Name changed)

Healing stories and stories in business are yet more applications and contexts for storytelling. As such, they do not form attributes of storytelling itself, but healing or therapeutic tales are more of an output or result of the tales. Similarly, patterning in tales has been much studied (see chapter 2.6) and whilst some distinct story structures exist, again they do not necessarily feature in the storytelling environment characteristic list.

Date: Mon, 17 Aug 2009 08:54

Hi Debbie,
I've been thinking about your list and I would agree with all your observations. There is however, something else which apparent but is very difficult to quantify. It seem to be a very intense state of listening in fact some tellers describe it as similar to a trance. Perhaps, it is what Stanley Robertson said was going into the Land Where the Stories Grow.
This state does not happen at every telling but it does happen often enough to be a recognisable characteristic. It seems to happen with folktales and

myths and may be helped by music. I don't think that there has been any detailed research on this phenomenon but that is does exists across the age range and across the world is indisputable.

Good writing,

Senga

Hypnotic Stories – Friday, 28th August 2009

Yesterday was a busy and interesting day. Went to Edinburgh to see Rhod Gilbert's latest stand-up show at the Festival, but decided to go through early and spend the afternoon catching the festival atmosphere. When I got into the bus station however, it was torrential rain and having been optimistic I didn't have an umbrella or waterproof coat. The idea of trekking all the way down Princes Street to the Book Festival was too much, so went to the Storytelling Centre instead to pick up some tickets. When I was there I got talked into getting a ticket for The Lost World afternoon performance which merges electronic music, puppetry and video (it was still raining heavily so I was easily persuaded).

As I was standing there, water dripping steadily off my hair onto the wooden floorboards, I heard a voice behind me exclaim, 'I don't believe it!'. I turned round and there was Blether storyteller Senga. I always seem to meet someone I know when I go there now. Senga and I had a cup of tea together. She said she wanted to speak to me about the email I'd sent about the characteristics and her comments. She spoke about the intense state of listening that happens when some stories are told. I remembered talking about Fran Stallings' hypnosis in storytelling article (Stallings, 1988) and holding a discussion about it at Blether. Stallings article posits that telling a story can put listeners into a light trance. Senga was wary of calling it a trance, referring to 'intense listening' instead. I have experienced this myself as a listener. In my experience it occurs when the visual imagery is rich and you are drawn into the story world, seeing the tale unfold in front of you. It reminds me of the total absorption that can happen after seeing a film at the cinema, or having been immersed in a novel. It takes a little time to refocus on events happening around you.

Date: Thu, 3 Sep 2009 16:58

Debbie
Your email took the long route going to my old email address first. However, it has arrived, and I think your list looks good. I can't quite articulate it but would there be something about the way in which it connects with the heart /emotions/ imagination and bypasses parts of our brains? Don't know how to say that as you can tell, but it seems like an important essence to me, I'm sure someone could find a better way of expressing that!!
Good wishes, Rachel

All these comments show the way storytelling is viewed and valued. There is a sense of true belief and worth about stories which reinforces their importance and justifies their existence as tellers. This has to be the case for there are certainly few financial benefits of being a full time teller. It is for the love of stories.

Aside from soliciting feedback on the characteristics via email, I posted a blog entry on Professional Storyteller[6] (a Ning network), my personal blog and tweeted about the blog posts on Twitter. I made it clear that the list of characteristics was developed from working with tellers in Scotland and was open to responses from anyone. As was expected, the responses were less numerous compared to emails from tellers I knew.

deb_max: what IS storytelling? Can we define it? Please RT and give me your feedback: debbie maxwell: Storytelling Traits #storytelling #storyteller #story
10:05 PM Aug 1st from TweetDeck

noneandonly: @deb_max #storytelling is creating your own history.
10:20 PM Aug 1st from web in reply to deb_max

deb_max: @noneandonly thanks for the reply! Do you mean in telling your own personal stories? #storytelling
10:33 PM Aug 1st from TweetDeck in reply to noneandonly

noneandonly: @deb_max Yup. And with journalism, storytelling is telling your interpretation of facts while creating history. Yr helping create history.
1:33 AM Aug 2nd from web in reply to deb_max

noneandonly: @deb_max I realize storytelling is vast, but I'm most familiar with personal and journalism. That's my input…
1:34 AM Aug 2nd from web in reply to deb_max

As mentioned in Bridge *Social media and Me*, I use Twitter quite extensively and follow or subscribe to storytellers through it. The tellers are mainly in North America and England and many use storytelling in business or organisational contexts. Others are performance storytellers such as Sean Buvala[7]. As such, most of them as seeking net-working opportunities online and developing their personal branding.

Noneandonly[8] gave me some feedback however, responding to my Tweet question rather than linked blog post. Her answer referred to personal stories, but as Benjamin so poetically describes, even in folktales, 'traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.' (Benjamin and Arendt, 1999, p. 91)

Storytelling Traits[9]
Posted by Debbie Maxwell on August 1, 2009

I've been thinking a lot about how to characterise and define storytelling. I know it's always going to be a contentious issue and a lot depends on what your personal idea of storytelling is, but I've listed what I think below.
Please let me know if you agree or disagree with them. Perhaps I have missed something out, or one of the characteristics shouldn't be there?
N.B. A word of context first - this list was created on the basis of observing storytelling in Scotland (mainly through storytelling clubs). I'm hesitant to use the term 'traditional storytelling' as it is a continuing contemporary art form.
Here goes:

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles
2. Collective memory - shared memory of stories throughout storytelling communities
3. Performance - formalised event (different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu)

4. Liveness - real-time event, not generally recorded
5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice - as a tool for characters, emotion, suspense etc
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination - of both listener and teller
9. Connection between story, teller and listener - emotional, personal, group
10. Desire by teller and group to share stories

All thoughts welcome!

3 Comments

Comment by Rachel Hedman on August 4, 2009 at 11:42pm

Dear Debbie:

Though you were hesitant to use the term "traditional storytelling", there is a difference between "traditional storytelling" and "organized storytelling". Your points #3 and #10 tend to be more prevalent in organized storytelling.

Knowing how hard it is to define anything—let alone storytelling—I think you did a lovely job.

Until we tell again,

Rachel Hedman

Comment by Debbie Maxwell on August 5, 2009 at 2:44am

Thanks very much Rachel. What do you mean by 'organized storytelling'? Is that in a business context?

Comment by Rachel Hedman on August 5, 2009 at 12:30pm

"Organized storytelling" could also be called "platform storytelling". When storytelling connects with businesses, then often it is called "corporate storytelling" or "storytelling in organizations."

I wrote a thesis in 2001 entitled "Transformation of the Storyteller's Identity and Role through the American Storytelling Movement." I needed to establish a definition for storytelling. I also compared traditional storytelling to organized storytelling in part of the work. I interviewed 24 key people in the movement and asked their opinion of Kay Stone's definitions. It was at least somewhere to start.

According to Kay Stone, traditional storytelling is "the kind of narration that

> takes place in full oral tradition; it usually takes place in more casual contexts than do organized storytelling events, though it can be just as formal and performance-centered."
>
> Also, according to Stone, organized storytelling is "consciously scheduled and presented performances of stories in formal settings, to children or adults, whether in schools or libraries, on concert stages, or at storytelling festivals or other events."
>
> As for my own definition, storytelling is a co-creative experience involving senses with an intentional storyteller and acknowledged listener(s). This definition is intended as a guideline—not to be engraved in stone—and provides an expansive view to the art form by including various styles of the art. I expect this definition to evolve.

As seen above, Rachel kindly commented in some detail on my blog on *Professional Storyteller*. Whilst I take her points onboard about the differences between platform and traditional storytelling, I still feel that there is a marked distinction between normal conversation and telling a story, especially in a story club environment which is not a performance-based platform event. Similarly, there must a desire by teller and group to share stories, otherwise storytelling would not take place. This is true even when sharing anecdotes in an informal pub setting. However, her definition is very succinct and apt and was considered earlier in 9.2.

To summarise, the invaluable feedback received from tellers covered the following aspects:

- Authenticity, belief
- Props
- International/cross-border
- Performance issues
- Connecting different cultures/times
- Well-being/healing
- Active listening/listening trance

From these, the key components not accounted for in the initial list were knowledge (the sharing of culture and wisdom) and authenticity, or belief in tales and the culture. Including them on the list results in the following (new additions in italics):

Storytelling Characteristics (in no particular order):

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles
2. Collective memory—shared memory of stories held in storytelling communities
3. Performance—formalised event (in that is it is different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu)
4. Liveness—real-time event, not generally recorded
5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice—as a tool for characters, emotion, suspense etc
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination—of both listener and teller
9. Connection between story, teller and listener—emotional, personal, group *& cultural (also known as co-creation)*
10. Desire by teller and group to share stories, i.e. intentional storytelling
11. *Authenticity on the part of the teller, shown by belief & conviction in their stories*

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles

Oral culture is renowned for its diversity (chapter 2) and even within the subcategory of storytelling, diversity remains apparent. This can take the form of the stories themselves, but also in the manner of their telling. Some tellers are quite traditional, remaining relatively stationary and letting the words and tales speak for themselves. Other storytellers are performance oriented, incredibly flamboyant, striding round the story space and using their whole body to tell the story. Some tell stories in their 'mither tongue' (be it Doric, Scots or 'Fife') while others take you on a journey to distant lands, perhaps telling stories of Asia and Canada.

2. Collective memory: shared memory of stories held in storytelling communities

In Scotland stories are shared, as one hears a story so somebody listening can pass it on in their own way (see chapter 8.3). As the stories are passed

on in this manner some of them are learnt without having to recourse to the printed word as an intermediary form. Ownership of stories is a thorny issue yet it is true to say that the teller only completely owns the story in the act of telling it. Over time, the story comes to exist as a myriad of versions, subtly adapted to each teller. The story is stored collectively in this sense, dispersed across the network of storyholders. Even literacy has failed to halt this, as often more than one version passes into print.

Collective memory occurs in a more conventional sense too in the stored body of stories a group collectively knows.

Time and again, the phrase repeated amongst Scottish tellers is 'sharing': sharing of stories and of knowledge. Focus is placed on the story, not the teller. It strikes me that storytelling in Scotland is not fully commoditised yet, and that the Scottish Storytelling Forum (who manage the accreditation scheme for professional storytellers) aids this through procedures such as the mentoring and apprenticeship system described earlier (chapter 8.2).

3. Performance: formalised event (in that is it is different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu)

Each story telling is a performative act. Performance is not a word that sits comfortably with many tellers yet without a suitable, meaningful alternative the concept and word remains. Storytellers do not sell a physical product or service; they market themselves. Without the live event a storyteller simply cannot exist. Stories cannot be told without an audience or group of listeners. They die without being passed on:

> There is a kind of death to each story when it leaves the speaker and becomes impaled for all time on clay tablets or the written and printed page.
>
> (Sawyer, 1997, p. 59)

4. Liveness: real-time event, not generally recorded

As each rendition of a tale is a live event, the telling varies slightly each time, due to factors in the audience, the teller and the environment. This plasticity is used by storytellers to adapt the story to their audience. Sections of the story can be extended or dropped as the case may be depending on the reaction of the listeners. This subtle interaction between listeners and tellers adds to the participative and immersive experience even though listeners may not be consciously aware of it. Similarly, stories selected for the occasion can be changed on the hoof, as long as the teller has a large enough store of possible stories.

The key distinction from books is the live nature of storytelling. The printed word is static, immutable, and lifeless. Traditional storytelling is malleable, communal, and the ever changing as the teller fits the story to themselves, their audience and the occasion.

5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact

As the traveller saying goes 'eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart'. There is some-thing very powerful and intrinsically engaging about a storyteller standing in front of you, able to make eye contact.

6. Voice—as a tool for characters, emotion, suspense etc

These are essential tools of the storyteller. Language is a powerful tool, some are told sparingly, others richly descriptive. Not only does it make for varied tellings but helps to consolidate the identity of the teller (as does dialect).

As Yashinsky notes below, although the teller portrays all characters, they do not have to be explicitly acted out;

> When a witch screams in a story, the storyteller doesn't have to. The audi-ence is better able to imagine the witch's scream without the teller acting it out.
>
> (Yashinsky, 2004, p. 152)

7. Gesture and body language

This is fairly self explanatory. Storytelling styles vary from the teller remaining relatively motionless on a chair, others move around the space, gesticulating and mapping out the story physically. Either way, the movement or lack of movement affects the story and the impact on the listeners.

8. Engagement of imagination – of both listener and teller

Somewhat obviously, one of storytelling's key attributes is the oral or vocal element but intriguingly, the visual aspect is also important. The visuals are not only what is physically set out in front of the listener, i.e. the storyteller and the surroundings, but in addition, the mental imagery evoked by the storyteller's words.

> When I hear a great story, I can't tell you afterwards what the storyteller was wearing, or how they used or didn't use their hands, or anything else. All I saw was my own mind-movie as the story was being told.
>
> (Yashinsky, 2004, p. 151)

In a sense this is comparative to reading a novel where the visual stimulus is not largely the words on the page, but the images created in the mind's eye.

9. Connection between story, teller and listener: emotional, personal, group & cultural (also known as co-creation)

Not all storytellers can tell all stories. Part of the skill lies in knowing what stories suit their individual style, what stories appeal and what stories are appropriate for a particular audience. When successful storytelling happens the stories do not exist in the mind of the teller or the mind of the audience but somewhere in the space in be-tween. Where this space is and the form the story takes there is an individual experience, dependent on the emotional state of the teller and the listener. Storytelling is all about evoking emotion, mood and mental imagery. This is why the listeners have

a vital role, and exemplifies what makes storytelling such a participative experience.

> 'The beginning of the story itself creates an imaginative landscape through which we will travel. It also draws the listener into direct relationship with the storyteller. This reciprocity ensures the listeners that they are participants rather than observers. It is a dance where instead of holding hands, minds link in a reverie of silent images… Storytelling is a living art which takes place in the present between people. It is not a solo performance. The narrative urges listeners out of self consciousness into the story. As the imaginative response becomes more and more vivid, the listeners participate in heightened awareness of the event, as in a ritual.'
>
> (Quoting Laura Simms, Sobol, 1999, p. 37)

10. Desire by teller and group to share stories: Intent

Storytelling is always intentional. But intent must be on both sides. Whilst a good teller can draw listeners into the story, they must allow themselves to be drawn in, otherwise there is no successful storytelling. There are ears with the power to open mouths. Good listeners prompt and promote good stories, especially with novice tellers.

11. Authenticity on the part of the teller, shown by belief & conviction in their stories

This has been discussed already, following teller feedback and prompted for inclusion on this list by them. Authenticity and truth falls into difficult areas for debate. Authentic, or genuine storytelling has also been discussed in chapter 8.3 but in the sense it is meant here, it is down to the belief and honesty of the teller in their stories, what is 'truthful' is actually similar to believability.

9.4 Summary

This chapter has charted the development of a set of characteristics which highlight the key attributes of live storytelling. Based on observations and discussions with tellers in Scotland, the characteristics are not centred on the types of narratives used by tellers, but on the form of storytelling as a medium, the liveness of the event. These characteristics can now be usefully employed in wider contexts, and will be used in this thesis to connect and compare storytelling with new media (see Bridge).

Notes

1. Story storming or spontaneous storytelling happens when a teller asks the listeners to provide characters, settings and objects, which the teller then weaves into a story on the spot. Often the audience is encouraged to participate at other sections of the story too, by providing more objects or characters for the plot.
2. http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk/centre/scottish_storytelling_centre.asp – What is storytelling? (Accessed 13 February 2010)
3. http://www.crickcrackclub.com/CRICRACK/ART.HTM#meaning – What does the Crick Crack Club mean by 'storytelling'? (Accessed 13 February 2010)
4. What Storytelling is. An attempt at defining the art form. http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/st_defn.htm. (Accessed 13 February 2010.)
5. Memorandum of understanding for the foundation of the Federation of European Storytelling: FEST. Available online at http://www.swisstales.ch/_/FEST_09.html. (Accessed 13 February 2010.)
6. http://professionalstoryteller.ning.com (Accessed 13 February 2010.)
7. K. Sean Buvala's website: http://seantells.net. (Accessed 13 February 2010)
8. Twitter and blog posts have been reproduced with user names, on the basis that tweets, blog posts and comments are already in the public domain.
9. As posted on Professional Storyteller NING http://professionalstoryteller.ning.com/profiles/blogs/storytelling-traits (Accessed 13 February 2010.)

Chapter 10
Technology & Telling

This chapter explores some of the perceptions of technology amongst storytellers. Whilst in general, it could be said that tellers are not keen adopters of technology or new media, their voiced reticence actually belies an openness towards new media.

10.1 Perception of Technology

Before discussing 'technology' with storytellers, I spent some time debating the correct terminology to use. *Technology*, although largely used to denote digital computing, is a wide sweeping word in its pure sense. *Computing*, I felt, was too confining, and would exclude other technologies in discussions, such as mobile phones. (Mobile phones, essentially two way radios, are often assumed to be distinct from computers, although increasingly they are part of the blurring line between laptops, netbooks and telephones.) *Digital media* and *new media* seemed too vague and liable to be misunderstood. Part of what I wanted to discover was what the storytelling community thought 'technology' embodied. Therefore, 'technology' was used in semi-structured interviews. It must be noted however, that due to my introductory descriptions of my research (i.e. looking at connections between traditional and digital worlds) it would be fair to assume that 'technology' and 'computing' were considered by participants to be largely synonymous.

10.2 The Legacy of Jackanory

> A storytelling friend once told me a story about an anthropologist who happened to be in an African village when the first television was introduced. For about two weeks, the people were captivated by its images, sounds and shows. The old man who was the tribe's greatest storyteller stayed by his fire. After a while, people began to drift away from the TV and gather again by the fire. The anthropologist, observing this, asked one of the villagers why they no longer watched TV. "Don't you think the television knows more stories than the old man? He's never left the district and the TV brings in shows from around the world." "Oh yes," replied the villager. "The television knows more stories, but the storyteller knows me."
>
> (Yashinsky, 2004, p. 174)

It is clear that perceptions of technology largely depend on individual experience of and exposure to technology. Blue-sky thinking is all very well, but in user centred design (UCD), part of the challenge lies in walking the line between what users actually want, and what they think is technically possible.

> For those who are not designers, visualizing the form and behavior of software that doesn't yet exist is difficult, if not impossible.
>
> (Cooper, 2004, p. 56)

Some of the design tools therefore try to address this problem. Paper prototyping, for example, makes use of the fact that low-tech paper designs are presented, giving testing users the sense that nothing is set is stone, everything is mutable (Cooper, 2004, Buxton, 2007).

When discussing technology with storytellers in the context of 'storytelling' it soon became apparent that technology-enabled storytelling was considered in the main to be television. This is largely the legacy of *Jackanory*. The long running BBC series (1965-96 and returning in 2006) took children through a story, read by an actor from a book, which sometimes had accompanying still illustrations. It was simple, pared down, and is still

touted by storytellers as the prime example of storytelling on television. Aside from television, radio was cited less frequently as a possible medium for storytelling. As will become evident throughout the following pages, the visual component of mass (and new) media is the aspect which provokes most concern, seen by some tellers as standing in for, and thereby replacing, the imagination of the viewer.

> There used to be a programme called Jackanory, and that was a person who made eye contact through the camera and told a story. And for me, perhaps the most important thing about storytelling is the fact that the story comes from one person to another or group. But it's that person's imagination that is fired—they are *in* that story, and the giant that they see is very different from the giant that that person sees. If you give something visual to a child they can never get rid of that.
>
> Judy

The general view of technology as television and radio (as far as it intersects with storytelling at any rate) presumes a base level of passivity from the viewer. The viewer is a consumer, nothing more. Even in video games, with their inherent interactivity, users are playing within set tree narrative structures and visual environments. Users cannot directly impact fundamentals of the game.

When I asked Donald Smith from the Scottish Storytelling Centre about the assumption that storytelling is primarily for children, he pointed out that mass media has to take some of the blame.

> I think that would be the—that's the Jackanory syndrome, yeah? And 'Watch with Mother' and that whole idea that was shaped by the media. And that's interesting incidentally, in the way the media could almost disenfranchise, and disempower people from the idea that communities belong—that stories belong to whole communities and that they were for *all* ages.

However, the broadcasting paradigm of media is changing. The Internet and World Wide Web have heralded a new era of user generated content. Consumers are becoming producers (see Bridge section). As this way of

interaction becomes more prevalent, it is increasingly obvious that users are not simply passive consumers. But for these ways of *creation* and *creativity* to form part of a definition of technology by storytellers, they must be aware of the possibilities. Frances told me about the differences she sees between today and when she was growing up. She didn't have a television in the house until she was seven and even then, children's programmes only had a limited part of the schedule. Now, she sees a vast difference between herself and children who can potentially watch television, DVD or play with computers all day long.

Senga has been involved in projects with a computer scientist, investigating the role of storytelling in games development and so is familiar with some of the technologies children can harness to create their own games, thereby realising their own stories.

> In Neverwinter Nights, you can program, you know, you can set your own scene, you can choose your characters, you can dress them, you can make their conversation. And, all right, it's in a medieval fantasy setting, but you do have choices, and you have choices on whether you kill people, or whether you don't kill people. And I think, I would question the use of some of the games which are very male orientated, and people just go around counting the dead bodies that they've collected. Very little conversation, whereas I think that it's so important to have an internal dialogue, and to relate to the emotions of the characters in any story that you're telling.

In the environment Senga is describing, the participants used a modified version (Adventure Author, see Robertson and Nicholson, 2007) of the Neverwinter Nights toolset to create their own game.

Donald illustrated very clearly the changing relationship between consumer and producer—by contributing to content, by 'shaping the medium', users naturally wield more control and become more empowered. The similarities between new media and live storytelling are discussed in more detail in Bridge *Connections between New Media & Storytelling*.

> When kids can get their hands on those design capacities, that's what's very interesting. When you see the way that the technologi-

> cal education and the creativity thing come together is if youngsters can get the idea they can shape this medium…The kind of thing you folks are involved in where people can actually get into designing the websites, designing the interactions—the whole model there is about the creativity, about people getting the idea, "I can shape this medium, I can use it in the way that I want to use it," or my group wants to use it, or whatever. I think that's very important, very important. And that incidentally is paralleled by this big issue in storytelling, which again you see, the live model as a kind of curator or guardian of this, whose story is it? Who gets to tell the story?
>
> Donald

10.3 The Danger of Technology as a Crutch

The story so far has implied that storytellers are largely ignorant of technology beyond the mass media offerings of television and radio. But this interpretation is a simplification. Beyond the very valid, 'if it ain't broke then don't fix it' mentality of some storytellers, there is a reticence to adopt technology just for the sake of it. Conversely, as Owen explained to me, technology should not simply be discarded out of hand, for fear of losing 'tradition.'

> Some storytellers—they think that you should sit and tell a story and it's done quite simply. Not too much kind of, flowers and bells and whistles, not too much of that, just quite simple and they think that's what tradition is. But I've read about storytelling in a book that was written a couple of hundred years ago. The description of storytelling, the storyteller was jumping about the room and jumping up on top of chairs and flying about and you know, sounded really active. So, you know, I think some people base their ideas on tradition on an ideal that doesn't really exist. And I've found the same doing sculpture and woodcarving, especially that people think that there's some tradition that should be upheld when it's only their own ideas about tradition is.
>
> For example, if you gave a woodcarver, say 300 years ago, a chainsaw and said, "Right, you can cut away all that material with a chainsaw

> in two minutes rather than sitting there with a chisel for three or four days, or a week or whatever." They're going to pick up the chainsaw and they're going to cut away what they need, or most people are, you know. It's using the tools that are at hand and not getting locked into what something should be or what it is. I find myself doing it sometimes, you know, "Should I be doing this?" and then I realise, yes of course I should, just do what I feel, you know, and see where it goes.

However, technology is not a panacea and storytellers are quick to note this. Technology is not a substitute for poor communication, as those of us who have sat through innumerable PowerPoint presentations can testify. The story remains foremost; and the intent behind it is paramount. Stories reflect cultural norms (Zipes, 1997), and this can be seen most crudely in the stereotypes portrayed through Disney films and their similar contemporaries.

> I think technology has an effect on storytelling in that people have videos and DVDs and they play a story over and over again, but they play the story over with visuals. So that if you are telling Aladdin or, now let me think, or Snow White or any of the Disney versions of fairytales then you will get back the Disney version, and of course that has many cultural parts to it…If this is your first story, or first seeing of it, then you think that's what it is. And that's why I feel that it's important that people hear stories, make their own pictures, and then go to the book or the film.
>
> Senga

Again, the above snippet stresses the importance of the visual imagination, as well as the potential for technology to reinforce cultural stereotyping. I can't help but agree at least partly with Senga's words. If I read a book, then see a film adaptation, it invariably looks wrong. The characters are not how I imagined them. If I see a film before reading the book, the characters in the book are the actors I saw onscreen. With a few exceptions, the first time you hear (i.e. read, see or listen to) the story becomes the definitive version.

Whilst cultural stereotypes can occur in traditional storytelling, stories told through digital media (e.g. film, radio, Internet) can have far reaching repercussions based on the sheer number of potential audiences, as author Chimamanda Adichie spoke about *The danger of a single story* in terms of cultural heritage and literature (Adichie, 2009), and as Zipes laments;

> As commodity, the fairy-tale film sacrificed art to technical invention; innovation to tradition; stimulation of the imagination to consumption for distraction.
>
> (Zipes, 1997, p. 72)

The commoditisation of folk and fairy tales happens largely in broadcast media. (It is still proving a challenge to generate financially successful storytelling from the Inter-net.) Raymond Williams (1990) argues that the intent of media is crucial in shaping its technological form, firmly closing the lid on the notion of technological determinism (see Bridge *What is New Media?*). Storytelling is merely a tool, the teller chooses the shape of the story, together with input from the listeners. Sylvia mused on the use of stories in television soaps,

> 'Now it's become visual and it's a mixture of being deep and utterly, utterly trite, and tripe! But is it important? Is it storytelling? It is in a way. But what are people doing with it? Are they sitting down and using it as a drug? Or are they relating it to their lives? Is it worthwhile? If you say, if the person sat down and watched Eastenders every night, "Ah, Eastenders, great!" And if they missed it they'd have to record it. "Ah, Eastenders." If you took them out of that and put them with somebody telling a story, perhaps in the same sort of London east-end story, one-to-one or group would they go? Having to think too much or what? What would it be?'

What would it be indeed? All that can be said is that the Crick Crack Club in London is, like storytelling in the wider UK and North American (especially New York's The Moth[1]), proving popular. In the Dundee club we are constantly trying to find new members, our numbers remaining fairly stable, but with different faces drifting in and out every few months.

10.4 Is it Storytelling?

After establishing that the main forms in which stories can be told through technology (according to storytellers) are television and radio, a key question remains unspoken—is it *storytelling*?

> The most contemporary culture we have, the visual media, is all about storytelling, whether it is movies or songs, from pop stars or rock acts or whatever. They have to have a video to go with this, so that the video needs a story to sell the song, to sell the t-shirt and so on. And then separate to all of that is the computer game, where we look at the idea that there is a journey to assess some package that has to be collected, or gathered, or whatever, or a knight has to rescue a maiden. All of this stuff is just traditional storytelling—as I see it.
>
> Michael

Advertising was mentioned more than once by storytellers. One campaign that springs to my mind from recent years was the MINI's 'IT'S A MINI ADVENTURE' series from 2001[2]. Each advert encapsulated a short story centred around the car in some way. Even Google have created a set of advertising stories around their search engine[3].

The real answer to the question, 'Is it storytelling?' lies in the personal definitions of what storytelling actually is. When I asked Owen about his understanding of the term, he explained both the wider perception and his take on it.

> The basis for any good film is a story and it's always been like that. So that's storytelling as well 'cos the storytelling has to be strong in order for the film to work. And then there's storytelling—there's storytelling in books, storytelling in television, you even see it in advertising these days. You're getting adverts that continue, you know, you get one advert that's a certain scene and then a couple of months later you get another advert that's continuing on from that last scene. So there's a story telling happening there. Art is storytelling. In art, certain artists you know, they're trying to capture a story within what they do. Even in contemporary art nowadays, there's a lot of storytelling within it.

> So it's pretty broad. In a traditional sense, sitting down and telling a story, that to me is the use of the term storytelling. I imagine somebody talking, telling a story to an audience, that's how I think of it, but I know that the term story-telling is a lot, lot broader.

So, whilst *stories* are present in every medium, as is the case in this thesis, *storytelling* is something more specific. (Again, this could be circumnavigated by the prefix 'traditional' or 'contemporary', but for the general public both extended phrases would still require further clarification.) Building on Owen's comments above, another storyteller, Judy, told me how storytelling does not have to be seen as in competition with alternative ways of portraying narrative, it should be offered as an alternative form of expression and communication.

> I think storytelling's just something else that we should offer children…I don't think one thing replaces another…I mean, it's the same as saying, "Oh well, we've got television now, so we don't need the theatre. We've got the radio, we've got television, so we don't need opera. There's something different there isn't there?

Judy's view of the different media offering different experiences was echoed by another storyteller with a different slant (focus being on the similarities between the story).

> There is no competition—it's not a football team of this versus that team. These are all different routes to the same idea of giving the story, and if that story's about getting the princess out of the tower be it words, or book, in video, in game, in the movies, in a song…it's the same story. It's the same story.
>
> Michael

Yet perhaps the ability to tell narrative in all media is where the similarities end. As Judy pointed out above, they are different; the experience is different. Indeed, experience is being recognised now as an enviable trait. XD (Experience Design) or UX (User Experience) seek to provide good user experiences in design. (Kuniavsky, 2003)

Ruth talks about the energy of storytelling, querying how that could translate to other media,

> I had a meeting with some people at the BBC a couple of years ago and they were saying, "D'you think there's any way we can get storytelling to work on TV or radio?" And I said, "Well, I'd love to say yes, but I don't know how you would really." Because I just think it's so much about the energy that passes between the people, and amongst the people, and you just wouldn't get that bit, you know.
>
> 'I think the radio is better than the television for some reason. Although they brought Jackanory back recently didn't they? But you see what I think they do wrong is they use actors, not storytellers to tell the story. So it's a performance and, it's subtle in one way but you just, you know, you can feel it in your gut when somebody's per-forming or telling I think.

As we have seen, the storytellers I spoke to about technology-mediating narrative were polarised on its success. Some simply stated that there was no comparison, no competition, while other were vehemently against it, feeling that stories should be told in such a way that people can form their own mental imagery. Jess told me that she could happily tell a story over the telephone, she could tell a story in any way, but later on admitted that television was not her 'favourite thing where stories are concerned—it's very, very powerful, a powerful tool for sapping creativity out of that innocent child and installing its own.' A lot of her negative feelings on this arise from the visuals provided by television, effectively using someone else's imagination.

> Television suppresses imagination. There's no room for two imaginations. The child will take on that artificially made story and the one that they could tell might not be as good, or better, but they'll never know because they've allowed that to penetrate their imagination and that's the story they'll keep.
>
> …It's in competition with the oral stories, you know. It's in competition, because they've got that technology, that ability to flash the mind with colours and characters, you know. I mean, they're brilliant, but

> they're someone else's brilliance…So you may lose the message in a story if you allow this to blanket-sweep the minds of our young. I've got reservations let's put it that way. I don't condemn it totally. If the television is used by storytellers to sit down and tell a story to a child without the graphics then that's ok, in my mind, that's acceptable.'

As this strongly worded point of view from Jess shows, television divides tellers. However, a few storytellers reluctantly allowed that broadcast media versions of stories were better than nothing, assuming that 'nothing' was indeed the alternative. At least that way, the stories would be heard in some format.

10.5 How Technology is Used

All of the storytellers I know and interviewed use digital technology to a greater or lesser degree. Email, SMS texts, and mobile phones are all standard means of communication. Email is a particularly important tool,

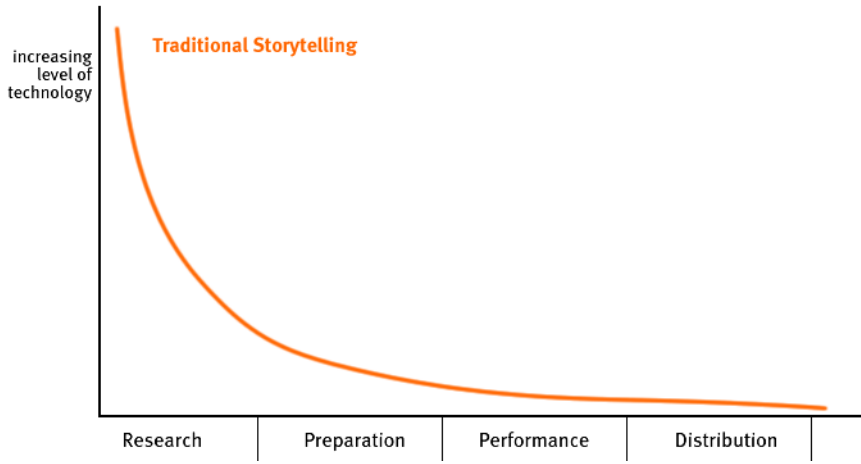
> Email's become a very, very important way of shaping and informing and assisting live communication and storytelling. It's a really good way to understand where people are coming from, and to help develop some element of shared aspiration or understanding, before or around whatever event you're having.'
>
> Donald

Email has certainly been invaluable for Blether Tay-gither as a way of sharing documents (e.g. funding applications, minutes from meetings, promotional flyers) and as a key way to promote events around the mailing list.

Some tellers have their own websites which serve primarily as online business cards, providing a bit of background information and contact details. There are a few 'groups' online (like Yahoo! Groups, a cross between an electronic mailing list and bulletin board) for storytelling; the Glasgow storytellers have one such group[4]. The Glasgow group's list has had limited success, only one or two members contribute and so posts have been dwindling.

The Four Stages of Storytelling

In so far as digital technology is used with storytelling, it is helpful to consider the process of telling a story in four separate stages; *research*, *preparation*, *performance* and *distribution*. The diagram below illustrates the relative levels of technology used in each stage.



Research

The *research* stage generally uses the most amount of technology in traditional, live storytelling. This stage includes sourcing the story, perhaps finding different versions and interleaving them to create the version the teller wants to share. If a story is heard and wants to be retold, this may involve speaking to the original teller and finding a written source with which to work or trying to remember the tale as it was told.

The Internet is commonly used as a resource, and helps in finding cultural background too. Frances was one of the tellers who use the Internet to help finding stories and story versions, selecting the best parts of each version into a story ready for telling. Frances' use of the Internet is typical of storytellers in Scotland. I recently told a story and was contacted by a couple of tellers who wanted to tell it themselves. I 'googled' the story and not only found it listed and viewable in a Google book online, but found a

YouTube video of the original author[5] telling the tale as well, which I duly forwarded on.

Preparation

The preparation stage can involve some technology too but is generally less than in the research stage. *Preparation* is the process tellers go through before actually telling the story to a group of listeners for the first time. Often, the bare bones of the tale are written down in bullet points (largely a paper and pencil activity) but I was pleasantly surprised by several storytellers who told me they record themselves telling (or reading) the story with notes, and then listen back to the recording to help learn the story. Sheila was one of the tellers who does this;

> 'So how do you go about learning a story that you?' I asked.
>
> 'I read it several times,' Sheila said, 'but I've found that I learn better by listening, so that's why I record myself telling the story. And er, I listen to myself several times—and I go for a walk with the earphones in, and listen to myself, retelling it. And I tend to learn from other people telling stories. It goes in easier rather than the written form.'

Another aid in learning stories is with a storystick, a low tech alternative. A storystick (as seen overleaf) is a visual and physical aid memoir, bits of fabric, ribbon, thread, paper are attached to a stick to represent the path of the story. The storystick can be used to prepare and tell the story, as the listeners can follow the progress of the tale with the stick too.

A final example of technology used in the preparation stage is finding photographs to inspire and fix elements of the story, useful when visualising the story during the telling. I have done this a couple of times, and Rachel told me that she uses photographs to provide a background when thinking about stories,

> 'So do you actually write out the bare bones of the story first?' I asked Rachel, trying to find out how she prepares stories.
>
> 'No, I just get it in my head and then I repeat that outline with a bit of embellishment to make sense of it to whoever's willing to lis

Robbie with a selection of storysticks

ten and I do that a number of times, you know, driving along and so on. And then I try to bring more to the story, but I often recommend to people that they dig around the story a little bit, so that the story becomes more real for them. Think about the environment that story might have been told in. I've got a story about an Indian market so maybe having a look at photographs of Indian markets, or paintings, or something like that that'd make you have something in your mind. Because I think if you've got a very—well with me, if I've got a sort of picture of what I'm telling then more comes out in the story, I think it becomes richer. Not necessarily that you're going to tell everything that's in your mind but you're going to bring a greater conviction to the story I think.'

Performance

As in the defining characteristics of storytelling discussed in chapter 9.3, *performance* is used in a loose sense, merely indicating that it is in some ways a formalised event (i.e. it is different from normal conversation, even if it is impromptu). Performance here means the live act of sharing a story (drawing on Goffman's definition cited in chapter 1.2).

As the four stage diagram indicates, the level of technology for this stage is low in traditional storytelling. Characterised by oral, live events, with a small group, there is no PA system or amplification technology and no recording of the event onto video. Props are sometimes used, perhaps a puppet or two, or the simplicity of a wedding ring to illustrate the final point of the tale, and occasionally a storystick as discussed above. Music is often incorporated, perhaps a little song interspersed, or a harp played halfway through. Beyond this though, it is the human voice which carries the tale.

There are only two examples of the use of digital technology I have discovered in the live telling, and these are out of the norm. One is the addition of electronic sound samples, a layered story soundscape. An example of this is described in some detail in Bridge *Alternative Realities: A Storyscape*.

The other example was the use of a photograph at one of the early Blether events. A photograph was projected onto a large screen (the meeting was held in the university School of Computing building, which had TV screens) and the teller told short stories around elements in the photograph during the evening. This worked very well, the photograph was from the teller's childhood, and the anecdotes were personal recollections.

Distribution

Once a story is told, it exists not only in the mind of the teller but in the minds of the listeners too. It is dispersed, but there is no technology involved. They are preserved not on tape or disk, but in visual and aural memory. Part of the value in storytelling is the environment in which the stories are shared, or gifted. Tales can be recorded (folklorists have been doing this for many years, e.g. Hamish Henderson) but on playing them back the experience is vastly different from hearing them live.

Several Scottish storytellers have released their own books[6], but the written form is also decidedly different from participating in a storytelling session. The written tales have been carefully edited, and remain the same each time they are read. Similarly, there are several audio CDs of stories from Scottish tellers (e.g. *The Matted Cat* by Jess Smith). There is no video equivalent, which bears up the previous emphasis on the importance of visual imagination.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Internet (an obvious channel for distributing stories through sites such as YouTube) is seldom used by storytellers in Scotland. Blether Tay-gither recently shot our first video for the site, whether more will be created re-mains to be seen[7]. (The film we created did not attempt to provide any visuals other than the storyteller in front of the camera.) By comparison, Carroll describes the ramifications YouTube has had on contemporary swing dance culture (2008). By posting archival footage of dance steps, it has altered the ownership and 'step-stealing' culture previously in existence.

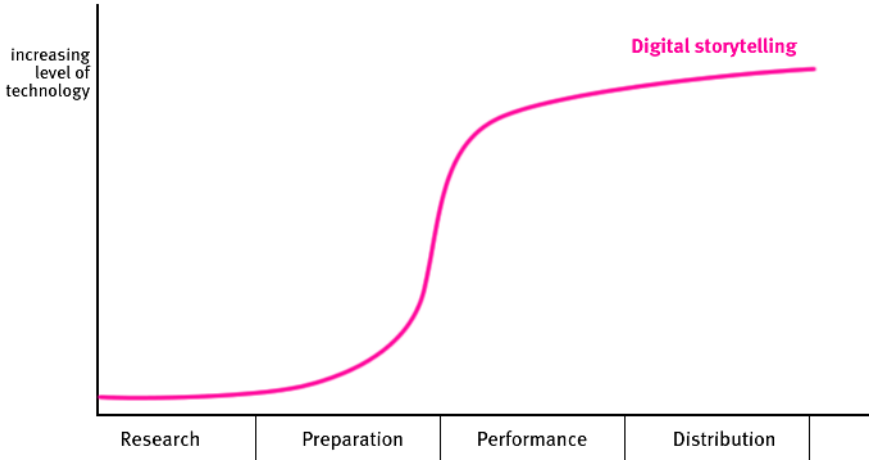
One application of technology related to *distribution* is in the form of follow on activities after hearing a story. Ruth told me how she provided information for children at a storytelling event in Iceland, handing out picture of flamingos so that children had some understanding of what the bird looked like.

The distribution of traditional storytelling is therefore very low-tech, if word of mouth can be considered a technology at all.

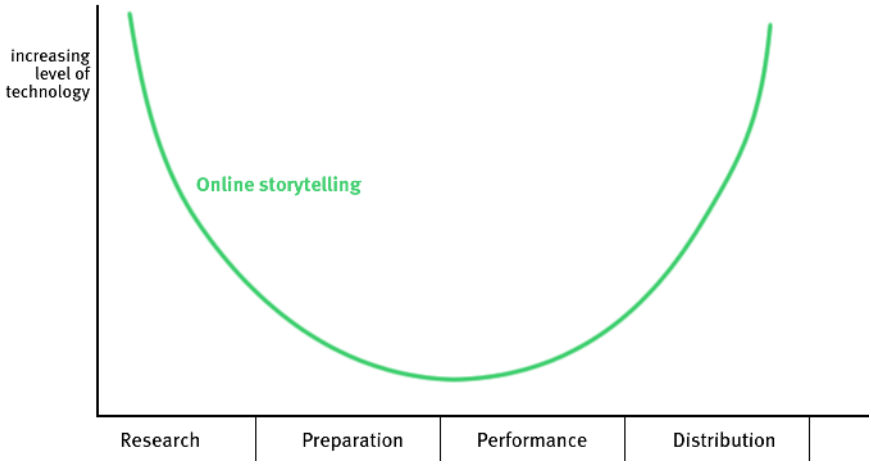
Other Storytelling Forms

The diagram presented for traditional storytelling can be extended to consider the role of technology in other types of storytelling. For example, *Digital Storytelling* (covered in more detail in Bridge: *Where worlds collide: Technology mediated storytelling*) can be represented by the diagram on the right. Digital storytelling is generally a scripted audio track, recorded and spoken by the author, and accompanied by still images (like a slideshow) or less frequently, video footage. In the *research* stage the degree of technology used is low; authors predominantly tell autobiographical stories, so the need to research their story is confined to personal memories and discussions with relatives and friends. *Preparation* has a higher level of

technology, as artefacts are collated (e.g. photographs, which may be digitised) and the skill set developed to use the technology (e.g. basic audio



recording and video editing software). The *performance* is technology enabled, recorded and composited, and finally the *distribution* is also digitally enabled, either through the Internet, local television, or burnt to DVD. We can also consider online forms of storytelling, such as that found on Twitter, where *research* includes developing an understanding of the environment the story is to be published in.



The *preparation* and *performance* are minimal (usually composing and editing posts on the fly) and the *distribution* is digital, posted online.

10.6 The Future of Telling

So we have seen that storytellers certainly use technology, but that it is more associated with administrating and generating work (e.g. contacting schools or councils via email to arrange sessions) than for creative, story-telling outlets. It should not have been surprising then that the responses from tellers regarding what the future of story-telling might be did not all include digital technology.

> 'How do you see the future of storytelling?' I ask Russell.
>
> 'Future of storytelling? Erm.' He pauses to think. 'Well, certainly, I think it is about encouraging people, to-to-to tell their own stories, to own their own stories, to discover their own stories—to discover stories that resonate with them, to share these. I think all of that is about community building, and you could argue that that's absolutely fundamental to human life—to have strong sense of community. I think that there's a potential that the electronic world we live in creates a kind of community, but very limited communities. Because the interface isn't in the way that…stories are eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart. To an extent yeah, you know, I can have a good—what d'you call these things? Chat rooms and all the rest of it. You can do that fine, and that can be good to kind of supplement relationships that we have, but I think if we only exist at that level that's sad…I think storytelling takes it that wee bit further, doesn't it? I think so anyway, in terms of the personal and the intimate and the relational thing.'

People are already telling stories online and through technology (see *Where worlds collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling*) but as far as oral storytellers are concerned, the use of technology must be appropriate. What we have learnt so far should not simply be discarded in favour of the latest gadget as Donald explained,

> I suppose that I'm saying that if we only make it the web—if we don't

> repossess it back into our own imaginations and intelligence, then we're missing out on something…If at the end of the day we don't take it back into our own imaginations and emotions then it's a kind of cold, outside thing really…Looking it up on the web can't be a substitute for understanding something.

This is the crux: understanding, sharing, community; these are all aspects of storytelling. It is interesting that Donald refers to the technology of books. At the time of writing Apple have just presented their new product, the iPad, their largest Multi-Touch screen (9.7-inch) to date, which promises, along with Amazon's Kindle and Sony's Reader, to provide a viable electronic alternative to physical books. Despite the hype surrounding these devices, as yet there has been no decisive product to rival the dominance of books in the UK. It remains to be seen whether the iPad will achieve this, in a similar way to the iPod which revolutionised the way we hear, share and buy music. Apple's success is only in part due to the physical elegance and aesthetic ap-peal of their products. Aided substantially by clever marketing, they promote an experience, telling the story of how their products will fit into your life.

When I interviewed Frances she suggested a way to connect digital interactivity and storytelling, drawing on the Smartboards often used in schools.

> 'I've never seen a Smartboard, I've just heard about them,' I admit, as Frances tells me about her sister using them.
>
> 'She uses it a lot for her subject, which is a lot of stories involved in it. She uses it very often—smart board. And I think, with children getting used to that and becoming more and more aware of it, if you go to a venue, either a school or a learning centre or something that has that—if you had your laptop there, you could project. And it could be just a visual image, could be something where they've got to choose which way to go, but you would have to have your story in your mind if it goes right or it goes left what's going to happen. You know yourself the stories that have the fork in the road and, do you choose right or left and it's always whatever one you chose is the correct one anyway. But again, children then could maybe interact with it that way

and go up and touch the board and things. I could see that evolving.'

'Would you ever be interested in trying any of those things out?' I ask.

'No. I'm too scared,' Frances says flatly.

'Because of the technology? Or?' I say, curious to know, when she has thought of a possible means to integrate the two disciplines.

'Because of the technology thing. I mean it took me all my time to do one PowerPoint presentation. And I had to get it over to the assistant secretary to spruce it up a wee bit for me, you know, to make it look good.'

I wonder idly whether there is a connection between the confidence building of storytelling and the use of technology. I recall a presentation by Lisa Heledd of BBC Capture Wales project[8]. She suggested that Digital Storytelling (telling and preserving your own story through digital imagery and audio) not only has a cathartic effect on the teller but a confidence boosting impact, as they master new technical skills.

Frances continues, 'I would love to see it done. Anyone that's good with making up programmes would be ideal. It would be an ideal way, or, you know, there are quest stories where you choose the right path or the left path and go on, and that is a story but interacting with that, with the teller.'

'Do you think enough storytellers would want to use that?'

'I don't think so. But I think it would be a niche for someone to do who was good at it. And that could be the way forward. You're killing two birds with one stone there. IT and storytelling, and English and listening, and 5-to-14 and everything else.' Frances shrugs, and I suggest that this could be a possible future career for me. We both laugh.

Lindsey was another teller who thought about ways to connect live storytelling and technology.

'Would you be interested in using technology in stories?' I ask.

'I would, certainly,' she replies. 'It's difficult because a lot of the storytelling takes place somewhere that, if you take technology with you, it'd be a huge hassle and possibly an expense as well, and it's not pos-

sible. But yeah, I mean it's certainly—I don't tend to craft my story, but I could certainly see how you could think about things and how it could make a bit spectacular. Or if you wanted to set a scene, just having a backdrop, you know, of a picture set up. I could see that sort of thing working, but as I say, I tend to use description so that necessarily wouldn't bother me, you know. I wouldn't feel I needed that, but I could see how other people might find that quite useful for setting scenes. It depends what you mean by technology as well.'

'Well, how do you define technology?' I ask, intrigued and not wanting to impose my view of what technology is.

'Well, you know, for me, technology is something you can plug into a wall. But, you can do all sorts. We were doing a story of the gingerbread man, so we tried to get the smell of ginger going round the room for example.'

This reminds me of The Man Who Planted Trees, an adaptation of Jean Giono's book by the Puppet State Theatre Company[9]. This puppet show tells the story not only visually through the characters but used pine oil on carpet beaters to waft the smell round the audience.

'And sometimes,' Lindsey continues, 'in the middle of summer, or the middle of winter, and you're telling a story about the opposite season, maybe it'd be nice to do something to make you feel that you're in the season. So fake snow, or bright lights for the sunshine. You know, just something to get people into the right zone so that they get the story you're telling and you're not trying to push them too hard to be in the right areas. And that I could see a role for whizzy gadgets but I don't know what.'

When discussing technology and storytelling during a review of the draft thesis some time later, Lindsey talked about how her attitude towards technology had changed. Lindsey came along to the final student exhibition discussed in Part III (chapter 14), and as a result claimed that her definition of technology, and how it could integrate with storytelling, has opened up. For example, the digital campfire (chapter 14) and gesture-based performative storytelling environments developed by the students caught her attention as possibilities for real use.

10.7 Conclusions

As these interview snippets have shown, there is a range of feelings amongst storytellers regarding the use of technology. By its nature storytelling is peripatetic and perfectly designed for travelling light. You need only yourself and the stories you carry in your mind. In practice, props and/or craft materials are often taken along to schools. The general feeling is that technology complicates things and in many ways I am inclined to agree. I have sat through innumerable lectures and presentations where perfectly competent academics (generally in the field of computer science I might add) have been flummoxed by projectors, and have started their presentations later than anticipated whilst the correct cables and technicians are found. Frances admitted feeling 'too scared' to try incorporating digital components into her practice, and whilst undoubtedly this is part of the reason that there is little or no crossover between the digital and live storytelling worlds, a larger factor is the knowledge that storytelling works as it is.

> 'Would you ever consider using any technology-type approach to storytelling?' I asked Robbie.
>
> 'Um, probably not. No. Basically, I don't have the skills, I don't have the knowledge,' she replied. 'But also, I think the beauty of it is, it doesn't matter. I went to get leaflets printed and this guy said, "What are you selling?" and I said, "Myself." And he read it and he said, "Oh yes, so you are."
>
> 'You know, you can go anywhere and do storytelling and all you have to take is you. You don't have to carry—I mean, I go with two big boxes of stuff, but theoretically you can just take you. And so other people seeing you think, "Well, I could do that too." So you don't have to. I mean it can be very hi-tech or it can just be basic and be every bit as good, I think. I always have my fabric that goes over my chair, it's lots of lovely stars. I take that to the schools so they know once you put that on, that's the story chair…I'm not a technophobe particularly but I would have to see something and think, "Oh I want to do that." Like I would quite like to have music as a background, you know, to set an atmosphere but, I can live without it.'

There would have to be substantial benefits for adding technology to encourage tellers to adopt it. Where there is more interest however, is in promoting themselves and utilising social media to generate work. The double edged sword of social media is that to understand it you have to use it.

Wednesday 20th January 2010

My thoughts on technology and storytellers have shifted over the last three years. Looking back at previous project plans it's quite striking just how much my goals have changed. Initially I planned on having a major technical element to my research, in the form of a highly interactive, networked site, possibly created through a Ning[10] social network framework, but with added components. I even went to far as to call it 'Story Sparks', and planned to theme it around a fire (i.e. hearth or travellers' campfire). It was going to draw on the sparking of stories from one conversation to another, providing a portfolio for tellers to promote their practice as well as connect with each other.

But as I grew to understand the storytellers better, I realised that all this 'network' would do is force tellers to conform to the digital technological world. That's not to say there isn't an undercurrent of veiled interest in technology. A few tellers have hinted that they would like to be shown around new media 'gently', and perhaps in the future I will offer a workshop to start to address this. Within Scotland, at least, I don't think tellers have harnessed the power of the Internet to its best advantage. Some personal websites exist, but they are hard to find, apart from links through the Scottish Storytelling Centre website.

Recently, a student from the University joined Blether and she wanted to start up a Google group to share stories in between meetings. I instinctively felt that it wouldn't work with Blether but raised it at the next steering group meeting. As I anticipated, there was only a lukewarm response at best to the idea. My past experiences with these kind of online groups is that you need a core of dedicated members to regularly check and post threads. Perhaps this is the kind of venture which would work better on a wider scale, across the whole storytelling network in Scotland.

Since Blether began, some of the storytellers have joined Facebook, and post regular updates. Our Blether Tay-gither Facebook group has a modest 10 members, but hopefully this will grow as more people hear about us. It's an-

other channel to promote events, at any rate. Apart from our monthly steering group meetings and Blether events, the main form of communication between myself and them is through email.

Perhaps naively, when I asked tellers in interviews about the future of storytelling, I expected that technology would form a big part. I envisaged an idealistic, harmonised future be-tween the two. The views I heard regarding storytelling in various media were polarised, 'there is no competition', versus, 'we're in direct competition.' I realise now that I was projecting my own hopes onto the tellers. The real future dreams of storytelling are for raising awareness and, crucially, recognition of the form, encouraging collective communities to flourish.

Yesterday evening we had our latest steering group meeting. I mentioned an idea I'd had, combining digital and physical into a Wishing Tree, or in our case, a story tree. The idea built on a concept a couple of members had considered earlier – seeing how far a story can travel, a gigantic game of Chinese Whispers if you will. I love the idea, but struggle to see how it could be documented, my immediate thoughts turning to electronic means, capturing photos, audio clips or Twitter-style text messages. The Wishing Tree (or Clootie tree) I imagined to be a physical tree, with hand-written versions of the story attached, and supplemented with a digital counterpart. The tree could be part of the Big Tent Festival which we are planning on being a part of again this year. I was really excited about the tree, and I described it to the group. The physical tree concept was grasped immediately and received very positively, but as I explained the digital aspect a sense of confusion and blankness descended. As one of the tellers put it, 'The shutters are down!'

I must confess I felt slightly frustrated – the digital potential was sidestepped in favour of the physical. The Big Tent promoted social tagging of the festival last year with #hashtags for Twitter and a dedicated Flickr account and group so I thought it could have all tied in beautifully. We shall see what happens...

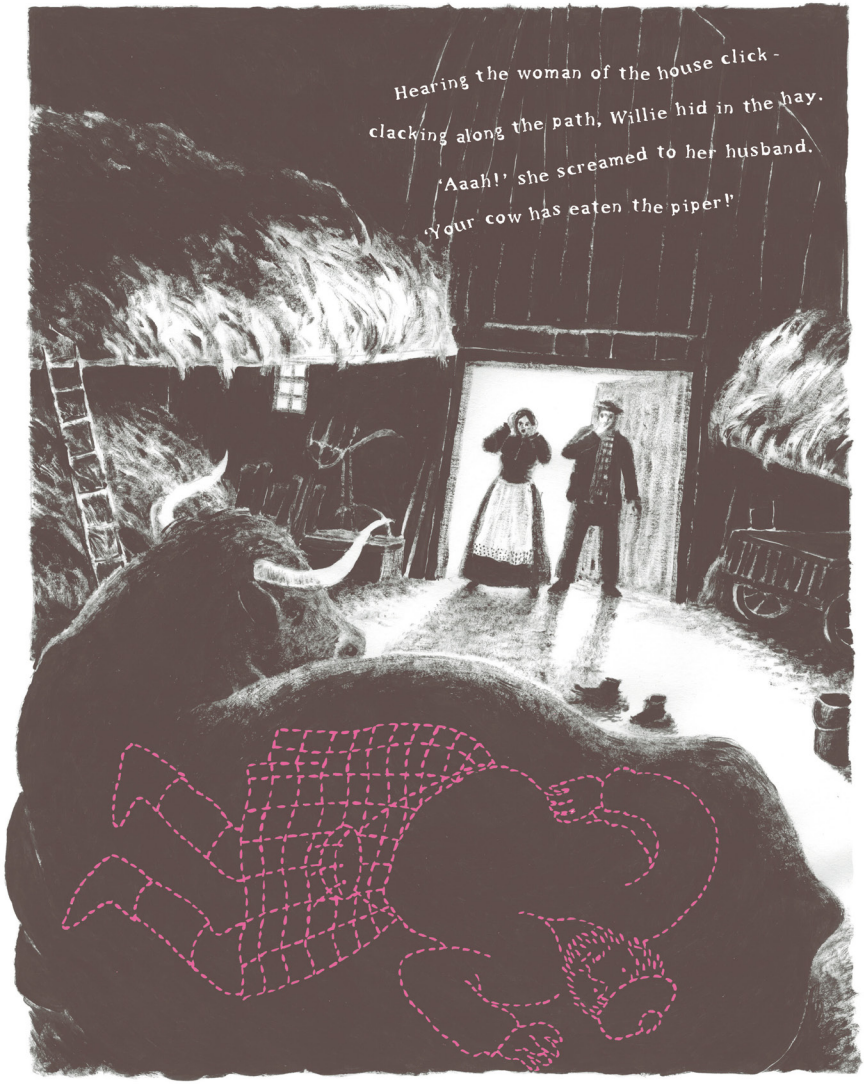
Notes

1. The Moth storytelling events are invariably sold out! (www.themoth.org. Accessed 3 March 2010.)
2. http://www.mini.co.uk/html/about_us/mini_education/national_ad-

vertising.html And http://videosostav.ru/video/1016981bab5354e72abb63786cbe8eb2. Both ac-cessed 3 March 2010.

3. http://www.youtube.com/searchstories – Accessed 3 March 2010.
4. http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/storytellingscotland. Founded 7 Sept 2009. It serves mainly to provide a commentary on Better Crack Club nights. In addition, the most successful email list group seems to be the Storytell Listserv (http://lists.storynet.org/lists/info/story-tell). Both accessed 3 March 2010.
5. Leslie Slape, The Tale-Teller. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AnBfB_sBVs. Accessed 15 February 2010.
6. For example, Tom Muir, Judy Paterson, George Macpherson, Donald Smith, and notably the traveller community, Jess Smith, Sheila Stewart, Besty Whyte, Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, to name a few!
7. Blether Tay-gither video, Big Man Walking http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDNQ5tByoWg. Accessed 4 March 2010.
8. http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/arts/yourvideo/queries/capturewales.shtml. Accessed 15 February 2010.
9. http://www.puppetstate.com. Accessed 4 March 2010.
10. Ning is a free, online framework to create social networking sites. Ning underlies the Professional Storyteller Network (http://professionalstoryteller.ning.com). It is an established, international network, though the majority of users seem to hail from North America. Accessed 4 March 2010.

Bridge:
The Relationship between Storytelling and New Media


Hearing the woman of the house click-
clacking along the path, Willie hid in the hay.
'Aaah!' she screamed to her husband.
'Your cow has eaten the piper!'

A man wanted to know about mind, not in nature, but in his private large computer. He asked it (no doubt in his best Fortran), "Do you compute that you will ever think like a human being?" The machine then set to work to analyze its own computational habits. Finally, the machine printed its answer on a piece of paper, as such machines do. The man ran to get the answer and found, neatly typed, the words: THAT REMINDS ME OF A STORY.

Gregory Bateson, Mind and Nature

This section, a semi-theoretical interlude so to speak, bridges the gap between storytelling discussed so far and the new media case study discussed in the next part.

Social Media & Me

I have a Jekyll and Hyde relationship with technology. I love the possibility of tech, but often hate and misuse it in practice. Take mobile phones. Everyone has one. So do I. But I object. I hate their intrusion into everyday life. I don't want to know that the girl opposite me on the train has child custody and financial issues, or hear them discussed (for the entire four hour train journey) as she explains her situation time and time again to what must be ALL her friends and relatives. Another thing I fail to embrace is text speak. It's not even a generational issue. Many people older than me simply 'get' how to use SMS. They fire off terse msgs with an almost instantaneous response rate whilst I am left painstakingly composing my reply in longhand.

So my relationship with social media has been fraught. I am a would-be 'early adopter'—get me on the bandwagon as soon as possible! I want to know what it can do, but I may not hang around. I've tried blogging but it didn't captivate me. I've been an active member of several online communities but once they begin to get too popular, with too many users, something is lost for me and I jump ship. The exception to the rule so far is Twitter. I was an early adopter, joining in April 2007 but after a quick exploration I forgot about it. There was no-one I knew to connect with: cyberspace can be lonely. Towards the end of 2008 however I was lured back by a colleague at university. I became hooked. Micro-blogging appeals to me, there's not the same level of commitment in terms of content generation compared with full scale blogging. Tweets are ephemeral. They can be as profound or as meaningless as you like. And Twitter can be a fabulous resource for networking and researching. I've discovered storytellers around the world on Twitter. I've found ethnographers. I've even found someone using auto-ethnography in New York and have subsequently had methodological discussions via Twitter and Skype.

Of course, the banal exists too. I first found out that UK celebrity couple Peter Andre and Katy Price had split up via Twitter's trending topics, before it was re-ported on the TV news channels and websites. Horror stories also do the rounds. The hash tag #ciscofatty dominated tweets for a week or so in March 2009. (Hash tags are a way of defining content, like image tags on Flickr, or on YouTube.) The story goes that a twitterer (I still struggle on how to refer to one who tweets) posted a tweet:

> Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work.

A reply was sent from a 'channel partner advocate' for Cisco Alert:

> Who is the hiring manager. I'm sure they would love to know that you will hate the work. We here at Cisco are versed in the web.

And so the tirade started. It was tweeted and retweeted ad nauseam (retweeting is comparable to forwarding an email). The incident reached mythic status and even in-spired a website: www.ciscofatty.com

Twitter, for better or for worse, encapsulates current opinion and can provide a format for telling stories (see *Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling*).

deb_max: Epitaph to modern living? #42 "I drove into the desert to find myself. When I was completely lost I pulled out my GPS." http://bit.ly/14Uc27

2:40 PM Aug 30th

For my part, I tend to restrict tweets to a few uses: sharing or 'retweeting' weblinks (partly as a semi-permanent form of bookmarking), describing storytelling events, or documenting my PhD progress.

deb_max: I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. #quotesIdLiketoUseInmyThesis

10:38 PM Aug 19th

jbaldwin: @deb_max A handbag? #quoteslbetyoucantgetawaywithinyourthesis

11:31 PM Aug 19th

deb_max: @jbaldwin bet I could! I've already half quoted a Saki story cos I love it. #quoteslbetyoucantgetawaywithinyourthesis

11:36 PM Aug 19th

Less frequently I include more personal details. For example, I tweeted about my uncle's death. It was a simple way of telling my friends (who I tend to not to see face to face very often) who knew that my uncle was ill without having to go through the initial awkward conversations. Most of all, it just seemed natural for me to use Twitter as a medium for sharing the news.

deb_max: My uncle died this morning. 2hrs later I dreamt a tooth fell out. #postpremonition #cancerishorrible

12:11 PM Aug 18th

deb_max: urgh. hate funerals. Reckon I could probably cry at funerals without even knowing who the person was.

1:46 PM Aug 25th

Upon reflection, I also realised the subtleties of hashtags to transmit information without being part of the main tweet body. (Tweets are a maximum of 140 characters including details such as hash tags, RT or retweet abbreviation and @username to reply to someone.) In the case of the first tweet above, I included #cancerishorrible to communicate that cancer was the cause of death, rather than explicitly and somewhat more verbosely stating 'my uncle died of cancer'.

Twitter is often criticised for being self-indulgent, populated by users who 'randomly shout into the darkness and hope somebody's listening' (Twouble with Twitters, 2009), but as Carr (2010) noted, the real value of Twitter is 'listening to a wired collective voice…At first, Twitter can be overwhelming, but I think of it as a river of data rushing past that I dip a cup into every once in a while.'

So much for Twitter. I also use Facebook and LinkedIn and was a member of Bebo and MySpace amongst other networking sites. I tend to use Facebook and LinkedIn more sparingly than Twitter. I find the complexity of Facebook wearisome. Third party applications such as Farmville[1] bemuse me so I leave well alone, simply updating my status on occasion. I have created a Blether Tay-gither Facebook group[2] however, in a bid to seize any opportunity to promote the group. However it has so far proved of limited value, all of the Facebook group members are on the wider Blether Tay-gither email list so receive all updates via email anyway.

I walk the technology tightrope between love and hate. Faced with a room of technophobes I become the evangelist, extolling the life-changing benefits of increasing mobility, social media and web2.0. Yet put me in a room of technologists and I continually reflect upon the need for meaningful social context and engagement. This thesis is in some ways a mirror to my relationship with technology and social interaction. I am one of the threads that spans the world of storytelling and new media. Working with storytellers has deepened my conflict rather than resolving it.

Notes

1. Farmville (http://www.farmville.com Accessed 16 February 2010) is a game on Face-book, where you can 'grow delicious fruits and vegetables and raise adorable animals on your very own farm'.
   FarmVille is a real-time farm simulation game developed by Zynga, available as an application on the social networking website Facebook. The game allows members of Facebook to manage a virtual farm by planting, growing and harvesting virtual crops, trees, and raising livestock. Since its launch in June 2009, FarmVille has become the most popular game application on Facebook, with over 75.2 million active users and over 18.1 million fans in January 2010.
   According to contributors on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FarmVille (Accessed 16 February 2010.)
2. Facebook Group:
   Facebook Groups are used for discussions and events etc. Groups are a way of enabling a number of people to come together online to share information and discuss specific subjects. They are increasingly

used by clubs, companies and public sector organizations to engage with stakeholders—be they members of the public, employees, members, service users, shareholders or customers. A group includes but is not limited to the following: the members who have joined, recent news contents, discussion board contents, wall contents, photos, posted items, videos and all associated comments of such items. According to contributors on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook_group#Networks.2C_groups_and_pages (Accessed 16 February 2010)

What is New Media?

This thesis explores the relationship between storytelling and new media. Considerable reflection and discussion has been spent on the nature of storytelling (with a specific focus on the observations of the local Scottish storytelling community). It now necessary to contemplate the role and nature of new media.

'New Media' is a commonly used phrase, along with other apparent synonyms 'digital media' and 'interactive media'. On closer inspection however, *new media* embodies a whole set of arguments and connotations. It is therefore important to set out clearly what the term means in the context of this thesis, whilst also reflecting upon a few of the parallels within storytelling culture.

Whilst new media understandably embraces a wide range of technologies (for example, the Internet and hypertext, mobile phones and physical computer games like Nintendo's Wii) there are several defining characteristics which can be drawn out (see next section *Characteristics of New Media*). Although these traits are not necessarily *all* present in *each* example of new media, there exists enough of a correlation between media objects to render the attributes meaningful and indeed invaluable for future discussions on the relationship between new media and storytelling.

Media, Technology & Content

So why use the term 'new media'? Several alternatives exist. 'Digital media' is one. Digital media suggests that 'digital' (i.e. non-analogue or binary) representation is the primary distinguishing feature of such media. Given that digital representation is fundamental to the increasing types of computer-based media (e.g. digital photography, audio podcasts and video files), it follows that the meaning attributed to such a term and its sub-

sequent characteristics is a largely technical one, encompassing all digital technology and placing no distinction upon their use and context. In addition, hybridised media objects incorporating both digital and analogue elements would fail to be adequately included by such a phrase. Manovich (2003) stresses that using a purely technological definition for such media results in the definition falling prey to frequent revisions as specific technologies evolve, superseding earlier versions.

'Interactive media' suffers from similar issues. On some level, all media are interactive; an oil painting requires interaction and engagement from the viewer to comprehend it. Paul (2003, p. 67) states that, 'the term *interactive*, for instance, has become almost meaningless due to its inflationary use for numerous levels of exchange. Ultimately, any experience of an artwork is interactive, relying on a complex interplay between contexts and productions of meaning at the recipient's end.' Whilst Paul notes that this *interaction* takes place as a 'mental event', manifesting itself into a more tangible interaction in digitised, interactive artworks, her comments recall Manovich's reflections on 'interactive' (2001, p. 55). Manovich claims that interactivity is 'too broad to be truly useful'; once information is transferred into digital representation it becomes inherently interactive.

Other alternatives to 'new media' include the more specific 'digital technology' (which suffers from the same issues outlined above), 'social media' and 'web 2.0' (both too specific to be useful here as they merely relate to a subset of the Internet communication system, although they helpfully include social and cultural contexts).

Having identified and discarded the alternatives, what are the implications for adopting 'new media' as the preferred term for this thesis? New media is a far broader expression and as will be explained, encompasses cultural and intentional aspects of digital technologies rather than simply confining the definition to technical execution.

Both Lister (2003) and O'Neill (2008) note the contemporary connotation of 'media', namely 'The Media'—the mass media of tabloid journalism and popular televised news channels. This use of the term has the unfortunate result of diluting the primary meaning of medium as a channel or conduit for intentional expression. 'New media' however suggests a more exciting, cutting-edge venture with clear boundaries between 'old media' and the new.

McLuhan adopted a very broad interpretation of 'media', making no distinction between a medium and a tool—that which extends the body or senses. He famously cited the electric light-bulb and wheel as media. This definition served for McLuhan as his edict, 'the message is the medium', claimed that the real outcome or understanding of the medium was not the specific content it delivered, but the changes it produced in human perception. So the example of the wheel as 'an extension of the foot' (Lister et al., 2003) resulted in 'radically chang[ing] the experience of travel and speed, the body's relationship to its physical environment, and to time and space.' (Lister et al., 2003, p. 78) This sweeping understanding of technology or tool as media has largely been discredited as part of a technologically deterministic viewpoint (Lister et al., 2003, O'Neill, 2008).

Shaleph O'Neill (2008) offers a more balanced perspective on the nature of 'media'. He points out that analysis of the word 'medium' leads to the conclusion that 'a medium is something we use to communicate with…It is something we use to put our thoughts, ideas and feelings into…a medium has to be some kind of physical entity.' O'Neill describes the act of speaking as requiring physical energy through the voice box, with the resultant speech mediated by air. The example is extended to writing, the physical pushing of a pen across paper, before arriving at the conclusion that 'Media then, are the physical elements and attributes of our relationship to the world that allow us to embed our thoughts and ideas in them in order to make them manifest.' (2008, p. 10) This explanation owes a debt to McLuhan's theories though it is imbued with a deal more specificity, for example it would be hard to dub the wheel a medium with this definition. Yet it still gives media a tangibility rather than a social process.

In contrast, Raymond Williams (1990) in *Television*: *Technology and Cultural Form* made a fundamental distinction between 'television as a technology and television as a cultural form' (1990, p. 7). To Williams, a medium had an intentional aspect, the 'why' of technology rather than purely the 'how' was the key and hence he held opposing views to McLuhan regarding the deterministic nature of technology. As Lister et al.(2003) explain,

> It is often implicit for Williams that a medium is a particular use of a technology; a harnessing of a technology to an intention or purpose

> to communicate or express. (2003, p. 83)

Thus the *intention* of the technology provides the medium, it cannot be separated from practice;

> A technology, when it has been achieved, can be seen as a general human property, an extension of general human capacity. But all technologies have been developed and improved to help with known human practices or with foreseen and desired practices.
>
> (Williams and Williams, 1990, p. 129)

To clarify, these original intentions can be appropriated and used in ways that original designers and developers did not anticipate. For example the popularity of SMS, or mobile phone text messages, was not predicted and so was not initially advertised or promoted. Rizzo (2008) examines the use of mobile, or cell, phones, as applied to two opposing contexts, reappropriated to support a protest movement in the Philippines, and as a technological nanny, observing the surveillance capability. These cases studies underline exactly how important the intent and context of use is.

Lev Manovich also considers new media to have more than just a technical bearing. He states that 'new media is focused on the cultural and computing.' (2003). This connects with Manovich's 'transcoding' principle. He argues that new media has two key components, the computer layer and the cultural layer. The computer layer is the digital, computer data structured element understood by and developed for the computer, e.g. the pixels in a photograph. The cultural layer is the aspect designed for humans, e.g. the visual representation of said photograph on a screen. Each layer interacts with the other.

> To use another concept from new media, we can say that they are being composited together. The result of this composite is a new computer culture – a blend of human and computer meanings, of traditional ways in which human culture modeled the world and the computer's own means of representing it.
>
> (Manovich, 2001, p. 46)

Having outlined the main arguments surrounding 'media', it is worthwhile reflecting briefly on the ramifications of the 'new' component of 'new media'. New media immediately suggests a previous old media and in some ways this concept is useful. McLuhan asserted that the content of any medium is always another medium, for example the content of telegraph is print, print is of written word, and writing is of speech. Williams (1990, p. 45) offered an example where aspects from the printed press translated into the newer medium of television. (The headlining technique of printed newspaper is used, almost without exception, in televised news programmes where short summaries of main news items are shown at the start of broadcast.)

Bolter and Grusin (1999) extend McLuhan's notion in their book *Remediation*. They 'call the representation of one medium in another *remediation*'. As O'Neill explains, 'in remediation, new technologies assimilate ideas from older technologies and present them as new and better versions of the previous media form.' (2008) And indeed, much of today's computing owes itself to the visual culture of print. The notion of remediation will be re-examined when we come to look at the characteristics of new media.

To summarise then, the definition of new media adopted for this thesis is comparable in form to that of Williams'. Cultural and social implications are embedded in the meaning, whilst technological specificities are excluded.

Are there any parallels with new media and storytelling here? Just as 'new media' embodies the cultural aspects and not just the technology, so 'storytelling' also embodies an *intention*, the cultural ethos surrounding it, not the body of stories, story-structures, or story patterning. That is, 'Story' is the content and 'Storytelling' is the medium. This distinction is seldom explicit; form is often divorced from content and as we shall see in *Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling*, most research in storytelling and new media focuses on content.

Characteristics of New Media

The definition of new media offered above is a useful starting point, however it can be expanded upon through identification of common characteristics of new media objects. As it is not the author's intention to reinvent the wheel (even though this may result in a form of remediation!) a set of characteristics was derived from reflection on complementary sets from leading new media theorists (Manovich, 2001, Lister et al., 2003, Paul, 2003, Packer and Jordan, 2001, O'Neill, 2008, Oram, 2006). Although at first glance these disparate sets may appear quite different, on closer inspection they have many similarities, as O'Neill has noted (2008). The sets of characteristics were mapped out in order to spatially visualise their correlations. This mapping and synthesis resulted in the following list of new media traits:

1. Digitality
2. Multimodality
3. Immediacy
4. Dispersal
5. Co-creativity
6. Ephemerality

Each of these traits and the characteristic sets they derived from are discussed individually in some detail below. It should be noted that not every characteristic will be present in each type of new media object. As with any definition, imposing generalised characteristics upon a complex topic is a simplification, forcing distinctions between related ideas, therefore there are naturally overlaps and correlations between the attributes.

1. Digitality

> Digitality: the underlying technological structures which enable new media objects to be easily accessed, manipulated and remoulded.

The digital nature of new media is fundamental and enables many of its attributes. Digital technology is replicable, easily mathematically manipulated and is often de-signed as discrete, modular blocks (i.e. facilitating the development of reusable libraries and components, both in software and hardware). (Manovich, 2001, Oram, 2006)

The shift from analogue to digital has been instrumental in increasing the accessibility of new media to mass audiences. Although the initial outlay of digital technology may be greater than its analogue counterparts, it is much cheaper to use. Digital photography is one such example, many more photographs are taken (and subsequently discarded) than compared with earlier film roll cameras. As Lister notes, analogue data is generally physically inscribed onto a medium (consider film tapes, photo-graphic strips, or vinyl records) but digital data exists as discrete information stored on a computer chip, whether this is as contact details on a mobile phone or files on a computer hard-drive. Therefore new media texts are 'dematerialised' in the sense that they are separated from their physical form as photographic print, book, roll of film, etc.' (Lister et al., 2003, p. 16) As such, digital data is never complete, it is always editable, able to be copied, altered or deleted. That is, 'digital media tend towards a permanent state of flux.' (ibid p. 16) This feature has directly contributed to the proliferation of users generating content (UGC), not simply consuming mass media produced content (this is closely linked to both *co-creativity* and *ephemerality*).

Digital data can however result in some constraints at the expense of analogue data. The early use of colour on websites was restricted to the number of colours computer monitors could display (256) but beyond this there was a list of 216 'web safe colours' which would be correctly displayed. Oram describes the in-world limitations of Second Life where avatars can walk, run and fly but not, for example, swim[1]. (Oram, 2006)

Manovich describes the digital nature of new media as 'numerical representation', i.e. data is represented mathematically, lending itself to math-

ematical manipulation; '*media becomes programmable*'. (2001, p. 27) He also argues that new media is modular, exhibiting a 'fractal structure.' This is readily apparent in some contexts, where programming structures like 'nesting' (the placing of discrete objects inside each other, similar to a set of matryoshka dolls) can be visually seen in video editing or animation programs[2]. However, whilst this is a consequence of digitisation and no doubt virtually always present in underlying code and physical component design, it is not always clearly visible to the end user. Another related, largely programming-derived construct is automation. The modularity and numerical representation of new media objects also allows for automation of operations, for example the batch processing digital images to resize and compress. (Manovich, 2001)

The digitisation of new media (like digital photography and non-linear video editing) derived from older media forms has resulted in some of the analogue workflows and characteristics being carried on, e.g. the paint brush and smudge tool in Photo-shop and the razor tool found in Final Cut Pro. The older analogue media is abstracted or 'remediated' in digital form (O'Neill, 2008, Bolter and Grusin, 1999). Digital, programming elements of computer technology (the features of modularity and automation) and the historical precedent and workflows of analogue media inter-act with each other to shape the way new media is manipulated and accessed. This interrelationship leads us to Manovich's *transcoding* principle and the next new media attribute.

2. Multimodality

> Multimodality: the range of modes in which users can interact, impact and experience new media.

The term 'multimodality' has an affiliation with new media literacies and education and literacy in particular. Kress (2000) argues that the written and the spoken word are both multimodal, i.e. 'constituted by a number of modes of representation.' For example, language uses a mix of modes;

> It uses the whole plethora of devices available to speech—pace, pitch-variation, rhythmic variations, tone of voice. But it also makes use of

> the potentials of temporal, sequential ordering available to this time-based mode rather than the initially spatially displayed mode of writing. (2000, p. 186)

Kress' semiotic reading of multimodality is useful in that it frames modes or media in their full context and opens up the possibilities for a wide interpretation of user expression and interactions. However, what is primarily inferred by multimodality as an attribute of new media in *this* setting is the diversity and mix of new media object forms, including creative artworks which seek an interactive engagement with the user.

Computer technology has revolutionised the way we navigate information (Walton and Vukovic, 2003) and the development of hypertext was a crucial step in this process. Hypertext allowed the creation of individual pathways through data, embracing non-linearity and making use of the inherent modularity of underlying computer data structures. The hypertextual Web now offers a range of media objects including video, audio, text, images and interactive gaming environments. The array of modalities available to users results in what Packer and Jordan have termed 'integration: the combining of artistic forms and technology into a hybrid form of expression.' (Packer and Jordan, 2001)

Similarly, O'Neill describes the convergence of mixed modes of media:

> The "intermedia", so sought after by the avant-garde artists of the early 20th Century, has become a reality in interactive media technology, where multiple images, multiple film clips and multiple sound sources become integrated in interfaces and artefacts. (2008, p. 20)

In addition, cultural overtones exist in hypermedia through 'the linking of separate media elements to one another to create a trail of personal association' (Packer and Jordan, 2001), which could even be considered a form of narrativity and sense-making.

But multimodality extends beyond the finished projects and the plethora of distribution formats. The variety of hardware input mechanisms is growing, ranging from the traditional typing keyboard, to mouse, touch screen (e.g. mobile phones, tablet laptops and the multitouch Microsoft Surface) audio and gestural devices (e.g. Apple's Magic Mouse as well as

virtual reality haptic devices and prototype Sixth Sense[3]) to discrete, wireless connected blocks like Siftables[4].

3. Immediacy

> Immediacy: the twin goals of new media to provide such an immersive expe-rience that it renders the medium invisible and to make media so pervasive that its incongruity becomes unnoticeable.

Immediacy, or immersiveness, is the ability of media to open a window into another reality, for example, a film attempting to put the viewer inside the action. Bolter & Grusin (1999) describe what they call the 'double logic of remediation'. New forms of media seek to provide such immersion with the content that the medium itself 'disappear[s] from the user's consciousness.' That is, 'the logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented: sitting in the race car or standing on a mountaintop.' (ibid pp. 3)

Lister et al cites *virtuality* as an attribute of new media and their definition is close to the sense of immediacy. Virtuality, they claim, can be considered in two ways, the virtual reality technology where senses are replaced or enhanced with digital ones (e.g. touch with haptic glove, sight with headset) and the more abstract 'metaphorical "places" and "spaces" created by or within communications networks.' (2003, p. 35)

Packer & Jordan (2001) confine their definition of *immersion* to 'the experience of entering into the simulation or suggestion of a three-dimensional environment.' Whilst undisputable, this is a rather narrow interpretation which excludes many forms that obviously have some degree of immersion such as text-based interactive narratives and games.

The metaphorical, abstracted type of virtuality cited by Lister et al, for example the space 'where you are when you're talking on the telephone', (Rucker, quoted in Lister et al., 2003, p. 35) is becoming increasingly common as communication net-works expand into more aspects of everyday life.

Caroline Bassett describes the feeling of using a mobile phone in public as splitting into different perspectives,

> When I switch my attention into my phone, I leave some part of myself behind. As a consequence I have some part of myself to re-turn to: to reunite with.
>
> (Bassett, 2003)

Ubiquitous computing strives to embed technology in daily life and routine, becoming what Norman (1998) called 'the Invisible Computer'. In this case, the technology or medium itself is not genuinely invisible, but so embedded and applied that it is no longer seen. Yet where Lister et al see similarities between virtual reality and metaphorical spaces, Bolter & Grusin see opposites;

> Where virtual reality invites the user to become part of a world beyond mediation, ubiquitous computing offers the user a world in which everything is a medium, because everything is or contains a computing device.' (1999, p. 216)

Ubiquitous computing, they argue, is an 'extreme form' of hypermedia[5], which they claim 'privileges fragmentation, indeterminancy, and heterogeneity' (p. 31).

O'Neill explains immediacy through the useful analogy of looking through a window. The main focus is of the view outside the window rather than the window itself (2008, p. 17). It must be the case therefore, that when new media objects become so commonplace as to pass unremarked they too must be like the window, unnoticed, unobserved.

4. Dispersal

> Dispersal: the distribution of new media objects across networks, accessible media creation tools and the geographical dispersal of increasingly mobile physical devices all enable dispersed production and consumption of new media.

The Internet is a prime example of the distribution of data; information is not stored in any one place but held across many computers (or servers)

around the globe. Indeed this is the main reason for the general sense of freedom (or lawlessness) of the world wide web. It is not controlled by one person, or one country. As a result, issues of ownership and copyright have been hotly debated, especially in the music and film industry, where the fight against file-sharing continues to rage[6]. New models of use and ownership are beginning to emerge; Spotify[7] provides unlimited streaming audio to users as a free service (with advertisements) or as an ad-free premium account where users pay a monthly flat fee.

A related and currently popular concept is cloud computing (e.g. Lenk et al., 2009), where not only are documents and files are stored on central servers online, accessible from anywhere, but the software to create documents (e.g. word processing) is run from a remote location too. One benefit of this model of working, apart from easier collaboration on shared documents, is the lack of software programs needed to be installed on the user's hard drive, freeing up space and ultimately paving the way for lighter, more portable devices. The MacBook Air is perhaps a step in that direction, with no optical disk drive and few peripheral connections, software is designed to be installed across wireless networks. By removing the CD or DVD drive, the Air laptop is much lighter and more mobile than conventional laptops.

The desire for growing mobility is also apparent in mobile phones, smart phones offer far more than just a simple telephone, even at the basic level they provide a comprehensive multimedia service with music, camera and photographs storage and Internet access. Devices like Poken[8] (a 'social' business card) attempt to bridge the divide between physical and electronic, sharing social networking connections wirelessly. Communication is vital providing support for social networking sites and micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter and the iPhone's AudioBoo). Larger screens provide a better Internet viewing experience and most are able to connect to local wifi hotspots rather than surfing across the slower and more expensive mobile phone network. This 'always-on' neo-nomadic society means work can be theoretically done anywhere, on the train, bus, coffee-shop or at home—anywhere there is a connection.

Lister et al cites 'dispersal' as a new media attribute and describes it as the following:

> New media are dispersed in comparison to mass media—dispersed at the level of consumption where we have seen a multiplication, segmentation and resultant individuation of media use; dispersed at the level of production where we have witnessed the multiplication of the sites for production of media texts and a higher diffusion within the economy as a whole than was previously the case. Finally, new media can be seen as dispersed rather than mass for the way in which consumers can now more easily extend their participation in media from active interpretation to actual production. (2003, p. 34)

This dispersal of consumption and production embraces the democratising impact new media can have. It can provide a platform for expression as well as consumption and leads neatly onto the next characteristic, *co-creativity*, where the line between reader and writer blurs.

5. Co-creativity

> Co-creativity: the experience and social dynamics of co-creating new media objects with other users as a bricoleur, contributing to revisions through feedback, interacting within and out-with predefined parameters.

The dispersal of production and consumption (enabled through the modular and digitally replicable qualities of new media) results in myriad alternative versions of media objects. Film clips can be copied, re-edited, have new soundtracks added and published on the Internet through sites like YouTube and Vimeo. Christiane Paul describes this as *recombinant* (Paul, 2003, O'Neill, 2008), that is;

> One of the pragmatic aspects of digital practice is that information can be infinitely developed, recycled, and reproduced in various contexts—it can breed new ideas through recombination.
>
> (Paul, 2003, p. 70)

The reappropriation of written texts can be notably found in forms of online fan fiction as evidenced by Jenkins (2008) and in the plethora of Har-

ry Potter fan fictions such as Ashwinder[9]. These texts can be reviewed and commented on by readers who in turn may create their own fictions. Quoting Jenkins, Catherine Tosenberger (2008), notes that 'the production and distribution of fanfiction "demystifi[es]…the creative process," and allows young writers to take on the mantle of "author," a role which traditional publishing reserves for a cultural elite.'

The democratising force of new media, coupled with the dispersal qualities, allows readers to become writers, consumers to become producers. Allvoices[10] is a news website populated with articles from the general public (the 'first true people's media'). Anyone can share. The collaborative power of the people has even enabled Internet 'celebrities' to make their way onto mainstream media through online and social media success. YouTube star Lauren Luke (aka panacea81) rose to Internet stardom via her make-up video tutorials (filmed in her bedroom on a webcam) and is now a familiar name on both television and radio, and even has the obligatory book deal (Luke, 2009). Similarly, thanks to Twitter, Justin Halpern has, according to the Los Angeles Times (Milian, 2009), been offered a book deal after generating huge numbers of followers and fans on the site from his account @shitmydadsays. Once a day, Justin posts gems heard from his father like this:

> The baby will talk when he talks, relax. It ain't like he knows the cure for cancer and he just ain't spitting it out.
>
> 5:51 PM Oct 22nd @shitmydadsays

Another example is the success of the film Cherrybomb, starring actor Rupert Grint (of Harry Potter fame) which was without a distributor. An online petition and Facebook group saved the film which is due to be distributed in early 2010 (Telegraph.co.uk, 2009).

Such collective activity (Shirky, 2008) is symptomatic of co-creation or co-creativity. Oram (2006) suggests two characteristics of new media pertinent to this topic, namely *convivial* and *open*.

> *Convivial*—Internet artwork will increasingly become a mash-up of contributions large and small from many people. A single author may try to maintain control, but will always feel the urge to incorporate suggestions he finds compelling from other people. And because of…

> the malleability of Internet content, people will feel the urge to suggest changes.
>
> The most Internet-appropriate artworks turn into group efforts, perhaps shifting one parameter this year and another parameter the next, always exploring past the art's own edge.
>
> *Open*—The more people get involved in an artwork, the more interesting it is. And in a medium that makes copying so easy, attempts to restrict distribution are probably not worth the effort—particularly if such efforts prevent the reuse of material that is one of the most interesting parts of the Internet experience.

Openness can not only apply to the creation of media objects and their distribution[11] but to the source code itself. Open Source software is increasingly popular, for example the email client Thunderbird and Open Office, a free-to-download open source desktop software suite similar to and compatible with Microsoft's Office. The developers of applications are cottoning on the opportunities presented, with Facebook, Twitter and Flickr offering developer access to APIs to encourage the design of creative custom add-ons or interfaces to boost alternative, unforeseen uses for the applications.

All of these types of interactions bring 'the relationships between the designer/user, author/reader and producer/consumer into question.' (O'Neill, 2008, p. 25) Even for those interactive experiences in which the user is merely navigating through the designer or artist's content, there is still a sense of ownership and authorship in the individual journey through the content (e.g. Jim Munroe's No Media Kings interactive fiction, Everybody Dies[12] and Penguin's WeTellStories[13]). These interactive stories do not 'eliminate authors: they multiply them, distribute their energy across a wide field of participants (including some nonhuman agents), redefine their powers and limits, and in general rewrite all the rules.' (Friedlander, 2008)

This blurring of reader and writer however, can be viewed somewhat negatively in two ways. Lister describes how 'the traditional boundaries and definitions between different media processes are breaking down as craft skills of media production become more generally dispersed throughout the population as a whole in the form of IT skills.' (2003, p. 32) Howev-

er, whilst one interpretation is that media production is becoming deprofessionalised with the advent of easy tools (such as video editing software iMovie or Animoto and website design templates in WordPress and VistaPrint) there is still a distinction between 'the cult of the amateur' (Keen, 2007) design and professionally designed media. As one tool simplifies for the masses so another technology appears (e.g. the increased ease of use and reduced need for programming ability in Adobe's Flash has been counterbalanced with the growing popularity of Adobe's Flex). The skill sets required for new media development are, like new media technologies, in flux, therefore to talk about erosion of skill sets becomes meaningless quite quickly.

The second way in which reader and writer blurring is potentially negative comes with O'Neill's claim that authoring tools can produce homogeneous end results. This is obviously true with some tools. For example, the online animation tool Xtranormal[14] (whose strapline 'if you can type, you can make movies' epitomises the very basic amount of skill required) produces movies which are instantly identifiable as Xtranormal productions, yet even within this one tool, the breadth of content (and quality) of movies is vast.

An Xtranormal scene and character

Bardzell (2007) notes similarities (and possibly constraints) in the interfaces of authoring tools (including Adobe's Flash and Apple's iMovie and GarageBand). He also observes similarities in the completed media objects, e.g. the repeated and easily identifiable use of preset gradient fills in amateur Flash animations, and the lack of spatial compositing in YouTube videos, due to the lack of layers in consumer video editing applications.

To summarise, *co-creativity* includes not only direct collaborative creation with other people but developing creative objects with and through digital technology. The technology enables more social interaction and distribution, thereby allowing indirect collaboration which allows response, reflection and interaction with the author(s). This relates to Paul's notion of *participatory* (2003, p. 68) where users participate in digital artworks, even though it is sometimes only interacting through predefined parameters.

6. Ephemerality

> Ephemerality: the transient nature of new media objects, as shown by the finite lifespan of their physical existence (e.g. mobile phones superseded by newer models), current accepted formats (e.g. file types/protocols) and the ever changing, mutable content they embody.

This characteristic has already been outlined in the *digitality* trait, where Lister (2003) considered a quality of digitality to be the state of or tendency towards flux. Paul argues that digital medium is 'dynamic', able to 'respond to a changing data flow and the real-time transmission of data.' (2003, p. 68) Content posted on most social networking sites is time-based. Facebook news feeds are organised with the most recent updates from friends first. RSS feeds (e.g. blogs, newsreaders) are similarly organised and Twitter is yet another example of displaying the most recent content first. The older content is still there, but harder to find, deemed less current and consequently less important.

Oram (2006) includes 'topical' as a new media attribute yet states that 'topical art need not be ephemeral' quoting Dante's Comedia as an example. Again, Twitter is a prime example, favouring up-to-the-second con-

tent and providing a snapshot of current hot topics. Trending topics (in the form of tag clouds in TweetDeck[14]) show the most popular topics and update at every refresh (the refresh rate depends on Tweet-Deck's settings).

Skittles website (www.skittles.com) is frequently overhauled. In March 2009 their homepage was a real-time Twitter stream of all tweets with the #skittles hashtag[16]. Another recent incarnation sought to provide up-to-the-second information, overlaying their website information over social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter.

Skittles website 15 November 2009

Modernista[17], an advertising company, have a similar approach to their website, layering a menu over social networking and collaborative sites like Wikipedia, YouTube and Facebook.

The malleability (Oram, 2006) or variability (Manovich, 2001) of new media is closely connected with the transience of new media. As mentioned previously, many alternative versions of new media objects can be created thanks to the modularity of digital technology. Ephemerality is a trait borne out of this digitality. Photography has undergone fundamental changes as a result of digitality, we now take photographs easily and quick-

ly in everyday occasions, without concerns of film and processing costs. As Murray (2008) notes,

> Photography is no longer just the embalmer of time that Andre Bazin once spoke of, but rather a more alive, immediate, and often transitory practice/form. In addition, the everyday image becomes something that even the amateur can create and comment on with relative authority and ease.

Digital data can be deleted or moved as easily as it can be copied and reinvented. Website addresses can change, hyperlinks can break, YouTube videos can be removed; the list goes on. As Manovich explains, 'a new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions.'

A Final Note on Interactivity

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, interactivity was not adopted as a characteristic of new media in the definition for this thesis. Interactivity is fundamental to new media in the same way that digitality is. However, as was mentioned at the start of this section, to explicitly include interactivity as an attribute in its own right is in many ways stating the obvious. Digitality was included because the direct consequences of modularity and replicability were considered to be facets of digitality. The consequences of interactivity are particularly enmeshed in *co-creativity* and *ephemerality* but to some degree impact on every attribute. Therefore it was not deemed necessary to forcibly delineate interactivity into a distinct characteristic.

Notes

1. However, in actual fact, SL avatars can swim; animations have been written (and sold) for swimming. Some game rules remain though, force of gravity, inability to walk through solid objects like walls etc. These limitations are the Linden Labs choice rather than any inherent technological constraint.
2. Film clips can be edited and stored as sequences, then a master se-

quence created composed solely of nested sequences.

3. Sixth Sense: A prototype mobile phone with built in projector and video camera, promising seamless augmented reality interaction with the use of gestures. See:

   http://www.pranavmistry.com/projects/sixthsense

   http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/pattie_maes_demos_the_sixth_sense.html (Both accessed 15 February 2010.)

4. Siftables (http://sifteo.com) are 'cookie-sized, computerized tiles you can stack and shuffle in your hands. These future-toys can do math, play music, and talk to their friends, too.' See also presentation on TED video:

   http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/david_merrill_demos_siftables_the_smart_blocks.html (Accessed 15 February 2010)

5. That is, a collection of media types, discrete, distinct and potentially unconnected.

6. The infamous case of Napster, an online music file sharing service, opened the gates for file sharing. Napster was closed down in 2002, and now operates as a legal music distribution service. When Napster stopped however, other file sharing sites and applications have taken over, such as BearShare and BitTorrent sites like The Pirate Bay, only to be routinely shut down or constrained (e.g. Mininova limited their site to Content Distribution at the Dutch Court of Utrecht ruling in November 2009. http://blog.mininova.org/articles/2009/11/26/mininova-limits-its-activities-to-content-distribution-service. Accessed 16 February 2010.)

7. Spotify is an application which users install on their computers. Music is cached and streamed, interspersed with a mix of both visual and audio adverts (assuming free account is used). Playlists of tracks can be created and stored in the application. (www.spotify.com. Accessed 16 February 2010.)

8. Poken: http://www.poken.com. Accessed 3 March 2010.

9. Ashwinder Fan Fiction, focuses on the OTP (One True Pairing) of J. K. Rowling's characters Hermione Granger and Severus Snape.

10. Allvoices News Website (www.allvoices.com)

    allvoices is a global community that shares news, videos, images and opinions tied to news events and people. It is the first true people's media.

> It's a place where individuals from all over the world can share what is happening where they are (location) at a particular point in time. Allvoices then brings together multiple voices or points of view via news stories, videos, images and blogs from the Internet, to provide context and build momentum. The platform provides the community with the ability to search and navigate a news event by location and category, to share and to have a discussion around it, to emotionally connect with each other's perspectives and complete the human story. (Accessed 3 March 2010.)

11. For example, author Cory Doctorow publishes novels electronically under Creative Commons licences as well traditional printed and bound format (http://craphound.com. Accessed 3 March 2010.)
12. No Media Kings interactive fiction, Everybody Dies, available from: http://nomediakings.org/games/everybody_dies_takes_bronze_at_ifcomp.html. Accessed 3 March 2010.
13. WeTellStories: http://wetellstories.co.uk. Accessed 3 March.
14. Xtranormal: Text-to-Movie:www.xtranormal.com. Accessed 15 February 2010.
15. Tweetdeck is a free browser for Twitter. It is an Air application, downloaded and run from the user's computer. (www.tweetdeck.com. Accessed 15 February 2010.)
16. Skittles Site Receives an Extreme Social Makeover http://mashable.com/2009/03/02/skittles-social. Accessed 15 February 2010.
17. The reassuring description on the Modernista opening page disclaims responsibility whilst explaining, Douglas Adams style:

> Do not be alarmed. You are viewing Modernista! through the eyes of the Web. The menu on the left is our homepage. The blog is ours. Everything else is beyond our control.
> http://www.modernista.com (Accessed 3 March 2010.)

Storytelling in Second Life

Storytelling in Second Life (SL), 14 January 2008

I continued my storytelling journey this weekend, but in SL. Having joined in April 2006 to see what the fuss was about, I only returned a couple of times, just enough to work out the basics of how to fly, change my hair and get some new clothes, all the things a new avatar needs. To be brutally honest, I found it hard to find and make friends in SL. Wandering alone round empty castles, shopping malls and sunbathing at the beach could only hold my attention for so long. However, I managed to discover and join the Storytelling Guild, which means I now get lots of emails about upcoming story events.

My avatar, Jodie, April 2008

Most of the events take place in convenient SL time (SL time is PST, or GMT-8) which does not always translate to the most convenient time for me (usually a 3am or 5am start GMT). However, a couple of events had reasonable start times and so adopting my alter ego of Jodie, with some trepidation I entered SL once again.

The first event was billed as Native American storytelling, starring an avatar called Cyon. I assume she is of native American descent in RL (real life). Her avatar looked the part, as did much of the audience (though obviously avatars may bear no resemblance to RL appearances – mine certainly doesn't).

I was under the impression that Cyon was a storyteller but I was mistaken. She used the voice feature of SL which meant I could actually hear her speak. There were two main problems. One, the level of distortion on her voice; she was obviously too close to the microphone. Second, she was reading from a book – very badly. As soon as she started speaking I could tell she was reading and when I heard her stumble over the words and noisily turn the page it was confirmed. To add insult to injury, she then struggled to pronounce native names and places. It was totally uninspiring. When SL crashed halfway through her performance I considered it a blessing in disguise and didn't bother trying to relaunch.

My avatar, Jodie, Halloween 2009

My second experience was much better. I teleported into Tinker's Circle in the Faery Crossing and found myself a seat round the campfire. The circle was fringed by a mix of Romany caravans and sumptuous tents. About ten people were there, mainly in Faerie attire, (including wings) but some were elven (a lot of SL incorporates role play on some level). It was obvious that everyone knew each other.

You can view other avatars' profiles which provides information on when the character was 'born' and whether they have used payment info. Most newbies don't have payment info, that is, they haven't transferred money between RL and SL (consequently, if payment information is stored it suggests a higher commitment to the world). Newbies often make money at casinos or by 'dancing' for money but it is time consuming and payment is minimal. The profile also lists which groups the avatar belongs to, and space is provided to describe your SL and '1st life'.

It's always difficult integrating into an online group and I looked very different from the others, wearing trousers, sporting short hair and no wings! So at first they seemed a little cliquey and I spent most of the two hour event observing.

It was text-based, as not everyone had voice enabled. Contrary to the first event I attended with Cyon, in the Bardic Circle everyone was invited to participate. A male avatar, Julivs (SL name) was the host. He was pleasantly spoken with distinct mannerisms, punctuating every sentence with a 'dear' or 'my dear'. This archaic phrasing was reinforced by his tall, rather dashing, monocled appearance, replete with pipe.

Julivs kicked off with a short intro leading into a Chinese fable about two monks who come across a women drowning. (a version is here: www.fisheaters.com/twomonks.html. Accessed 3 March 2010.) The theme of the session was 'Letting Go'. There was a good response from everyone at the end of the story. Group members followed Julivs with a series of poems. I will confess that I tend to become bored on hearing (or, in this case, reading) poetry, so it was not to my taste, but they were all received favourably by the group.

Near the end of the evening, I decided to try telling a story and IM'd (instant messaged, a form of private messaging between avatars) Julivs. I told (or rather, typed) the She-wolf, a Russian folk-tale that I thought fitted the theme not too badly. (The story is often told as a Selkie, or seal, tale of

a man finding a beautiful woman dancing, who has taken human form for one evening. He steals her animal skin, forcing the woman to remain in human-form. She is kept an effective prisoner for years, becoming wife to the man and bearing his children. When she finally discovers her animal skin she returns to her original life, leaving her human husband and children.) I had a text version of the story on my laptop and used that as a baseline but hand typed the words into SL to condense and tell the story in my own words.

It was a strange experience. As I was telling, I tried to gauge the audience response by the amount of text chat flying around. When I started I began by typing the name of the story ('The She-wolf') and this sparked a brief bit of banter between Julius and a female avatar, the implication being that I was referring to her with the story title. I didn't pick up on it until later (it can be hard to keep track of everything that's being said) and so decided to ignore it. Text silence reigned after that and I thought I held them, but it's hard to tell. Towards the end there were a few messages so I speeded it up a bit. But as soon as I finished by typing 'The End', there was a 'wooooo!' reply, shortly followed by an anxious, 'But what about her chil-dren?' It sparked quite a few comments – more than the poems I think. Julius and the others thanked me for the story. I left Second Life feeling elated and I can't wait for the next one!

Bardic Circle, The Faery Crossing, 09-03-2008, 15:00 SLT

The following extract was captured as Second Life dialogue.

[15:10] Julius: Well now dears
[15:10] James: merry meet all
[15:10] Shintar: Heloo Oceanlane
[15:11] Julius: For those that don't know me
[15:11] Julius: My name is Julius
[15:11] Julius: I am the ambassador to these fair lands
[15:12] Surazeus: fox and james would you two like a cushoin
[15:12] Julius: And it is my pleasure to present these events
[15:12] Julius: If you have something to share please IM me
[15:13] Julius: Tonight's theme, as suggested by Nimuel, is strength in weakness

[15:13] Surazeus: extra seating cushions
[15:13] Shintar: hmmm interesting
[15:13] Julius: But please do not let this restrict you
[15:13] Shintar: cant wait to hear
[15:13] Sceara: lots of angels here today! nice
[15:14] Julius: Well then
[15:14] Julius: While I have voice I have a song
[15:14] Ayjla: ohhhh yesssss
[15:14] Ayjla: i so love your voice
[15:14] Nimuel: Lovely, Julius!
[15:14] Ayjla: so ..uhmmm ancient ...
[15:14] Julius: I will use the magic card reader also
[15:14] Ayjla looks behind to see if some thwacking is coming up
[15:15] Julius: So that those without voice may know what I am singing
[15:15] Julius: This is one of my favourite songs
[15:15] Ayjla: dep purple??
[15:15] Ayjla: deep
[15:15] Julius: It is by the English folk singer Richard Thompson
[15:15] Ayjla: lol
[15:15] Daalia: Hi
[15:16] Julius: And was written after an event I will relate first
[15:16] Ayjla: the featherball event???
[15:16] Ayjla: hello y quen zenspun
[15:16] Julius: Richard was the singer in a group called Fairport Convention
[15:16] Nimuel: Greetings, Queen Zenspun
[15:16] Julius: Merry meet my queen
[15:16] Zenspun: greetings everyone
[15:16] Gypsy: greeting Queen Sis
[15:17] Julius: One evening the group was returning from a concert
[15:17] Julius: The driver of the vehicle fell asleep at the wheel
[15:17] Julius: Richard was sitting next to the driver
[15:18] Julius: He attempted to take the wheel to control the vehicle
[15:18] Julius: He overcompensated
[15:18] Julius: And sent the vehicle spinning off the road
[15:18] Julius: Many of the group were injured
[15:18] Julius: The drummer was killed

[15:19] Julius: Along with Richard's girlfriend
[15:19] Ayjla that is sad
[15:19] Julius: This is a song written in the aftermath of that
[15:19] Julius: It is called Crazy Man Michael

Julius posts text version of lyrics as he sings using the SL voice feature

[15:23] Julius: Thank you
[15:24] Ayjla: me claps
[15:24] Zenspun: very pretty
[15:24] Shintar: bravo bravo
[15:24] Willow: Yaaaaayyyyyyyy
[15:24] Maerian: I have always loved them and that song... thank you Julius!
[15:24] Echos: Thank you, Julius
[15:24] Nimuel: Tym dear friend Julius!
[15:24] Sceara: lovely
[15:24] Alexandra Fairey: wonderful
[15:24] Gypsy: so very sad
[15:24] You: thanks Julius, fantastic

Poetry and songs follow, new people arrive, some people leave…

[16:37] Julius: Well I think Jodie has something for us
[16:37] Sceara: a lovely evening all--thank you
[16:37] Julius: Jodie dear... do continue
[16:37] Maerian: ty.
[16:37] Maerian: bye...
[16:37] Saybera: Thank you all. It was an honor.
[16:37] Balpien: and thank you!
[16:37] Echos smiles
[16:37] You: well, i can leave it til next week. might be better then?
[16:37] Echos: What is the theme next week?
[16:37] Julius: Your choice dear
[16:38] Julius: We have no theme as yet
[16:38] Echos: ok, thanks :)
[16:38] You: ok then, well, i'll try and keep it short.

[16:38] Julius: If you would like to suggest that would be fine
[16:38] You: this is called 'The Moon Goddess'
[16:39] You: It's a folk tale from China. I think it fits in with tonight's theme quite well.
[16:39] You: once upon a time in China there was a very fierce king who treated his people very cruelly.
[16:39] You: He taxed them very heavily, so that he would have lots of money.
[16:39] You: Anyone who couldn't pay was severely punished and some families even had to sell their children to get money for the tax collectors.
[16:39] You: Every family had to send a male to spend part of each year working, without pay, for the king as a labourer, repairing and building canals and roads.
[16:40] You: Just so that the king could extend his empire.
[16:40] You: The work was so hard that many men died whilst working and their families became destitute.
[16:40] You: The people became poorer and poorer but the king didn't care.
[16:40] You: The king's wife was as gentle as he was fierce and time and time again she begged him to change his ways, but he didn't listen to her.
[16:40] You: One way, when he realised that he had more wealth than he could ever use, he decided he wanted something more.

Sitting round the campfire

[16:40] You: He wanted to be immortal.
[16:41] You: He gathered his officials and demanded that they scour the kingdom,
[16:41] You: 'I wish to live forever. You must all help to find herbs that will allow me to do this." he said
[16:42] You: It so happened that a learned doctor managed to discover some herbs which,
[16:42] You: if mixed together correctly, would give immortality to anyone who swallowed them.
[16:42] You: The doctor was killed so that he couldn't give his secret away...
[16:42] You: and the medicine was brought to the king.
[16:43] You: He showed it to his wife and said 'at last, i have everything i desire'
[16:43] You: But before he could drink it, he fell asleep.
[16:44] You: His wife was concerned, 'if the medicine really works, and he becomes immortal,
[16:44] You: the people will suffer forever.'
[16:44] You: So, she drank the medicine herself.
[16:44] You: 'Now he will die like anyone else. and things may improve for the people of the country.
[16:45] You: So saying, she quickly left the palace and ran to the countryside to hide.
[16:45] You: When the king awoke and found the medicine and his wife missing,
[16:46] You: he was completely enraged and ordered his soldiers to search for her throughout the land.
[16:46] You: He joined in the search too, and she was eventually discovered in a forest.
[16:47] You: When he saw her, he called her name, 'Chang Her,' but she ran with all her might.
[16:47] You: As she ran, she found that her feet were not touching the ground.
[16:47] You: She began to rise into the air almost as though she could fly.
[16:48] You: In front of the king and his soldiers, she rose higher and higher until she reached the moon.
[16:48] You: She has been there ever since and is known now as Chang Her the Moon Goddess.
[16:48] You: the end.
[16:48] mtd1952:
[16:48] mtd1952: *•.¸(*•.¸ ☐ ¸.•*´).¸
[16:48] mtd1952: .•*☐¨`•BEAUTIFUL°•´¨¨` ☐.
[16:48] mtd1952: ¸.•*(¸.•*´ ☐ `*•.¸)`*•.¸
[16:48] Echos: Lovely, Jodie, thank you!

[16:48] Echos claps
[16:48] Zenspun: yeah
[16:48] Nimuel: Wow, what a story! Thank you!
[16:48] Ayjla: lovely!!!!
[16:48] Julius: Very nice Jodie, thank you
[16:48] Zenspun: delighful story
[16:48] WriterOfPoetry: VERY GOOD
[16:48] You: thank you all.

Storytelling, SL & Me – 26th May 08

So my SL storytelling continued for a while. I went to the Bardic circle every week for a couple of months, but then RL got in the way and I haven't been back since. It was fun though and the closest I've experienced to RL storytelling. Although it's hard to read the audience and know the effect your story has whilst in the telling, the Bardic circle reminds me of Blether Tay-gither. There is good natured joking but no flaming. There is a sense of mutual respect. The only downside for me is that to integrate more fully into the group would entail spending more time in SL, becoming more Faerie. Whilst I like folk and fairy tales and don't mind reading the odd bit of Tolkien, the mere thought of learning Sindarin (one of Tolkien's Elvish languages) fills me with horror and having to converse on a mythic level does not appeal. Perhaps I'll rekindle my SL storytelling experience at a later date but for now, RL storytelling is calling me.

Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling

The story presented in Part II, *The Stories*, and in chapter 10 in particular, has been dominated by the relationship of storytellers to technology. This naturally reflects the ethnographic, storytelling led approach adopted in this research. However, it would be wrong to neglect the reverse—the attempt by technology to connect with storytelling or narrative. As we shall see, it is primarily found in two key ways, either a literate, or visual culture approach (sometimes applied to an 'illiterate' end user) or in an educational, storymaking context.

This section will briefly explore these uses of technology, firstly in non-literate applications, and secondly as viewed through McLuhan's four stages of media (audio/speech, print, visual and new media), i.e. determined by the examples' dominant mode of communication.

Helping the 'Other': Technology in Non-Literate Contexts

As mentioned earlier, some cultures are turning to technology to preserve their heritage. Equally, researchers are attempting to tackle information seeking and retrieval goals for non-literate users, set almost invariably in the developing world (e.g. Medhi et al., 2009, Chipchase, 2005). Whilst not necessarily narrative focused, these examples are useful to note here because they attempt to bridge the perceived divide be-tween literate and non-literate (or primary oral) culture.

For example, Thatcher et al (2006) developed an icon-based ATM interface for 'functionally illiterate' users in South Africa. This had limited suc-

cess due to, amongst other reasons, confusion in interpreting the meaning of graphical icons. Medhi et al's (2006) research on non-literate users in Bangalore suggested a graphical interface supplemented with audio and full-context video as suitable ways of developing user interfaces in these contexts. Medhi et al (2007) also note that wider research has shown that UIs (user interfaces) for 'illiterate and semi-literate populations [should] focus on broad elements, recommending features such as the use of graphical icons, minimal use of text, voice annotation, easy navigation, and the use of numbers for subjects who may be illiterate but not innumerate.'

Plauché & Prabaker (2006) investigated the use of speech interfaces in enabling rural villagers in southeast India to check the weather, market prices for ten crops, and rainwater collection techniques. Whilst results were encouraging, Patel et al (2009) claim that DTMF (Dual-tone multi-frequency, a way of navigating audio menus through a numeric keypad) provides better results than a purely audio/speech recognition system.

Turning back to storytelling, StoryBank[I], based in India, used camera-phones to encourage rural residents to share and tell digital stories through visual and audio means (Frohlich et al., 2009). The resultant 137 stories made by participants were considered to be split into two types, *development* and *cultural*. The cultural stories 'included advice from elders, moral tales and local events.' The results from this project demonstrate that mobile, audio based devices can be useful in situations 'where face-to-face storytelling is the norm'.

Similarly, (Agarwal et al., 2008) use Voicesites (audio sites or websites),

> A Voicesite is a voice-driven application that consists of voice pages (say, VoiceXML files) that are hosted in the telecom infrastructure.
>
> The Telecom Web exists and operates on the telephony network. People browse Voicesites by talking with them, traverse from one Voicesite to another via VoiLinks, and even conduct transactions over voice.

These Voicesites have commercial applications, in much the same way that visual websites can advertise businesses. The creation of a Voicesite was simple enough that ten out of twelve participants created a site in under four minutes (including the time taken to explain it).

Another example of technology and orality is that of *Living Cultural Storybases* (Packer et al., 2007), which 'seeks to nurture the oral heritage of minority cultures by developing respectful methodologies accompanied by appropriate technological solutions.' This appears to be achieved mainly through digital storytelling and participative methodologies, advocating a shared ownership of produced resources, crucially 'combining traditional oral storytelling in their *own* languages' (emphasis mine).

Finally, a conceptual phone-based system, the Oral Wiki[2], has been designed to archive informal justice system cases through audio (Jeffers and Agamanolis, 2009).

> The Oral Wiki is a proposed database technology that would store audio recordings of Abunzi decisions. It would provide record, playback, tagging and commenting functionalities akin to those found on wikis.

This brief foray into the ways research is tackling issues of orality shows that there is a positive emphasis on mobility and sound, due in large part to the proliferation of mobile phone devices in comparison to networked computers in developing countries. (Druin et al's mobile storytelling (2009), whilst text-based, is another example of a project attempting to build on the ubiquity of mobile phones.) Computers are much more expensive, reserved for higher social classes who have corresponding higher levels of literacy. Many of the approaches taken in these research projects stress the need for meaningful engagement with the local community (e.g. Medhi et al., 2007, Packer et al., 2007), creating and iteratively prototyping designs in situ with the end users.

Storytelling in Four Modes of Media

It would be wrong to say that the telling of stories does not happen digitally, however it tends to be based on literary storytelling. There are many examples of digitally enabled stories and there is much research into virtual and digital storytelling, yet much of this is approached from a technological perspective, or from a literary story-writing stance.

Audio/Speech Dominant

The previous section gave some examples of technology as applied to non-literate or semi-literate cultures, most of which were speech centric. In Western applications of technology, the preference is for visually dominated, textual or increasingly, video based interfaces and narrative. There remain a (comparatively) few narrative projects and applications however, which are audio based.

AudioBoo[3] (the 'iPhone audio blogging app') provides a way to document, tell and share stories via mobile phones and the Internet. Now being opened up on a trial basis for use with any phone, users record and submit their message which then appears on the AudioBoo website, along with hyperlinks to share the 'Boo' via websites, Twitter and Facebook.

Another mobile use of audio is in visitor interpretation. Prestongrange Museum[4] in East Lothian, like a lot of tourist attractions, offers an audio tour. This tour can be taken by borrowing an mp3 player from the site, or can be downloaded beforehand from the website, or alternatively listened to via mobile phone. A similar example was a project on the Scottish isle of Lewis in 2006, where stories about the dramatic coastal landscape were told via a hand-held ipaq.

> Visitors are free to choose their own walking routes and global-satellite-positioning tracks their progress around the bay. The area has been mapped as a series of "magiccircles" and when the visitor enters these circles the ipaq delivers tales and songs that are relevant to that specific location.
>
> This wealth of tales spans the area's history back to the Iron Age and features the Bornais Broch, local Fenian legends, the origin of the Brahan Seer's stone, the 19th century evangelical revival, Uig's strong connection with the Napoleonic Wars and the discovery of the Lewis Chessmen. To walk the beach and explore all six story circles will take about two hours.
>
> From Press Release 2006[5]

Some traditional tales in audio are also online, for example Baba the Storyteller's podcasts[6]. iTales[7] is a notable commercial attempt at sharing au-

dio tales, encouraging tellers of all skill levels to upload a story. Each time a story is bought (they are down-loaded as .mp3 audio files) the teller receives a commission. Prices vary (typically ranging from $0.55 to $5 as of 3 March 2010). In a similar fashion, The Story Chest[8] offers a download service of audio stories for a comparable price. These two websites are relatively recent additions (iTales came out of Beta in 2008), and it will be interesting to see how well they make the commercial aspect work. A free streaming radio station, *Story Lovers World!*, ran for one hour a week on KSVY, Sonoma, CA, and was hosted by storyteller Jackie Baldwin. Although it is difficult to determine whether the show still runs, previous episodes are available to hear online[9].

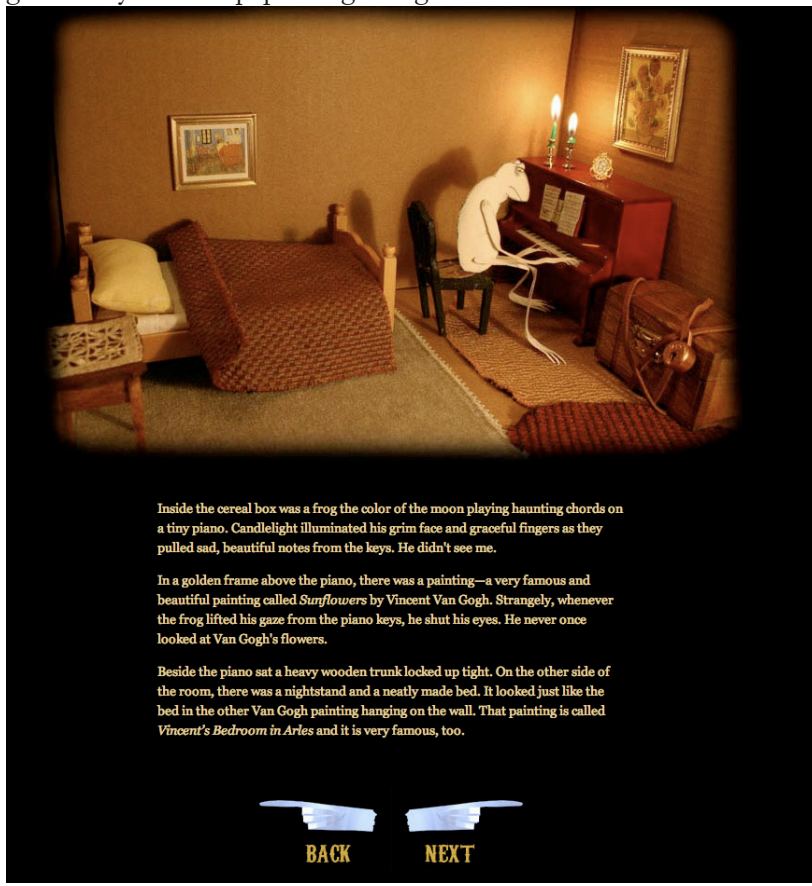
The Moth (an incredibly popular New York storytelling group) creates podcasts of their live storytelling events and also makes stories available to hear on their website. The professional quality of the website and online presence (which includes an active Twitter account and Facebook group) reflects the younger storytelling audience (20s and 30s) and the up-to-date currency of their events[10].

Another archive of stories online is at StoryCorps *national day of listening* website[11], dedicated to encourage people to gather stories one day a year and publish them online. These stories are similar to digital storytelling in a sense; they are biographical, personal anecdotes in interview format rather than folktales, but they are purely audio, with only a thumbnail photograph of authors.

Print Culture

By comparison with the rather small amount of sound or speech dominant examples of technologized storytelling, print (or text-based) narrative flourishes. Ranging from previews of books on Google[12], e-books (published easily on sites such as Lulu.com) and fan fiction (e.g. fanfiction.net), written forms of stories abound. Fan fiction begins to add a more interactive element compared to printed books, as readers and authors can interact through reviews and feedback. Shortbread stories[13] provides a crossover between writing, publishing and audio. Authors are invited to submit short stories in written form, and if selected by members will be recorded as an audio story.

Interactive narrative has been around almost since the invention of hypertext, with stories linked across webpages, branching in similar ways to the printed CYOA (Choose Your Own Adventure) books. Interactive narrative is a topic in its own right (Leishman, 2004), but suffice it to say here that there are many kinds of genres, some more text based than others, some incorporating visual animations and ambient sound etc[14]. A recent simple hypertext, imagery and text driven story is *Life is Life: A cerealized story*, by Stephanie Watson[15]. Chapters are linked from the home page, and each 'page' of the story is illustrated with a photograph and some text, telling the story of a sad paper frog living inside a box of cereal.



Life is Life: A Cerealized Story

Dreaming Methods[16], 'a fusion of writing and new media exploring imaginary memories and dream-inspired states' have created a selection of 'digital fiction projects' which embed video, interaction and text, woven together. These dream-like pathways through narratives are immaculately and professionally produced.

Another type of interactive narrative is found in the form of collaborative writing tools which, unlike the highly crafted examples of Dreaming Methods, No Media Kings[17], and Donna Leishman's 6amhoover site[18], enable anyone to take part. We Make Stories[19] is one such example. Launched by Puffin publishers, We Make Stories was developed to help young readers and writers create their own stories. This commercial site works by charging a payment to create a story, but viewing and sharing them online is free. The stories are structured around five scripted frameworks, a comic strip, treasure 'quest' journey around an island, two characters, and a more loosely structured text-based ebook. Storybird is a similar storymaking website, where users can create their own electronic storybooks, using a simple drag and drop inter-face to add from a library of professionally created illustrations, whilst copy is easily typed onto each 'page'. Finished Storybirds can be shared with others via hyperlinks. The writing process itself can be collaborative too, each author taking a turn in writing a section of the story.

A more formalised approach to writing is available at WEbook[20], a space online for writers to share and rate work, thereby promoting a self-publishing community of writers.

> Our community of readers and writers is here to help improve the writing of aspiring authors, share feedback and have fun.
>
> http://www.webook.com/Company/aboutus

Other collaborative text stories can be found at Novlet[21], Name Your Tale[22] whilst very short fiction is at One Sentence[23] ('True stories, told in one sentence'). A final example of an interactive storytelling environment is Storytron[24], another purely textual interface, where branching narrative structures and plots can be created through a Storyworld Authoring Tool (SWAT).

A current popular way of telling narrative online is as microfiction or

nanofiction[25]. Unsurprisingly, the microblogging tool Twitter is a leading proponent of this. SecretTweet[26] allows users the opportunity of posting anonymised tweets, often of a autobiographical, personal nature. Several users tell stories on Twitter, a current project is that of @_gregorsamsa, the protagonist of Kafka's Metamorphosis[27]. The story is being 'tweeted' in 140 character bursts . Similarly, *The Good Captain* was initially told on Twitter and is now available as a book on Amazon[28]. Other examples of microfiction on twitter include @VeryShortStory, @smallstories (uses both text and photography), @mobilefiction and @microfiction.

> As the years went by, my wife's jewelry collection grew larger. One piece for each mistake I'd made. Our secret to a lasting relationship.
>
> 7:17 PM Mar 1st 2010 via Ping.fm - @VeryShortStory

In 2009, The Times launched a competition as part of The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival, for the best Twitter fiction.

> The bee entered via the bus driver's window; browsed a meadow of sugar and sweat; dodged two rolled newspapers; exited, sting intact.
>
> fuzzsixty7[29]

The Never-Ending Stories[30] website is a collaborative storymaking project on Twitter. Users can add to an existing story, or create a new one, through the website. Updates are posted on Twitter. EpicTale[31] is a similar collaborative Twitter story, where users submit the next segment of the story to @ epictale. Poetry is also present on Twitter, for example Twihaiku[32].

Apart from the types of narrative noted here, Twitter also showcases fanfic and fanfic role play[33]. A notable example is the hype surrounding *True Blood*. The HBO television series *True Blood* is based on a series of books by Charlaine Harris about vampires in modern day Louisiana. The TV series and books have spawned official websites and fan fiction sites, however, the marketing of the brand has extended into the real world, offering the TruBlood drink (synthetic blood for vampires in the canon) for sale. The real life version is a carbonated blood orange (naturally!) drink. Twitter is not immune to the True Blood phenomenon either. All of the main characters and several additional fictitious characters have Twitter profiles, and post in character regularly, if not prolifically[34]. Scenes and scenarios, some

canon, some not so, are 'acted' out in real time with tweets. MixTweet offers a way to view conversations between groups of users, and there is a corresponding True Blood group[35]. And so it was that on Wednesday January 13th 2010 I attended (virtually, and anonymously through MixTweet) an evening enactment of True Blood for Dracula Night[36]. The event was scripted, and followed a Charlaine Harris short story, *Dracula Night*. As explained above, the tweets were posted in real time, and the conversations slowed unfolded. Non-dialogue is indicated by asterisks;

> Re-bandaging my shoulder. *looks at the tender, raw wounds from @WereWitchHallow's teeth* At least it doesn't look infected.
>
> 8:30 PM Mar 1st via web @SookieBonTemps

The MixTweet live feed was accompanied by music from links to a Blip.fm dj. It was an interesting event, but there was no ability to comment as an observer; the MixTweet simply showed tweets from the main characters, and there was a sense of confusion in the lag and re-ordering of some of the tweets. However, it was a live, text conversation and certainly was the most inventive use of Twitter I have experienced.

The list of fiction and narratives online is immense and this section has simply dipped a toe into the sea of online stories. However, the key point is that, without exception, all the examples here draw on written literature for inspiration. Traditional storytelling is simply not a frame of reference.

Visual Culture

Aside from the speech and text based narratives described, there are a number of digital narratives with their focus in visual culture. The most documented of which is *Digital Storytelling*[37] (Lundby, 2008a). Digital storytelling refers not to generic digital or technology enabled storytelling, but to a specific subset, a type of storytelling typically characterised as an audio slideshow with still photographs or images accompanying an audio soundtrack (around two to three minutes long and told in the author's voice). Recent digital stories have been incorporating some video footage, but in the main the focus is on the story (which is generally autobiographical) and not the technology. Crucially, digital storytelling is 'performed by

amateurs and not by media professionals.' (Lundby, 2008b, p. 4) The stories are generally created in 'institutional settings' (Hertzberg and Lundby, 2008), such as the recent Capture Wales project[38] and the process of crafting the story is as important as the technological skills learnt. The completed stories are fixed, not interactive, and are presented as either web video clips, or on CD-ROM or DVD formats.

There are a few professional examples of digital stories creeping in to this primarily amateur domain, for example, the photojournalism on *Africa Knows* combines excellent photography with crafted, written stories (note no audio here). Similarly, Mindy McAdams website on teaching online journalism has a detailed description on how to create a digital story (with audio and images) for journalists[39].

There are also lots of online tools to create digital stories, sites like VoiceThreads (a collaborative storysharing site with audio and images), Animoto (an automated video editing and production site), Heekya, Empressr, and YouTube all serve as outlets for budding authors[40].

Digital storytelling is multimodal, combining audio and imagery, but there are some examples of narrative online where the focus is on the im-

Image from The Whale Hunt

agery. Jonathan Harris' *The Whale Hunt* is one such case, documenting a whale hunt in painstaking detail and mapped against a timeline. The interface is not only novel and engaging to use but also strangely compelling to watch[41]. Images move as in a slideshow by default but can be navigated by clicking on the timeline at the bottom of the screen.

The photograph sharing site Flickr has a group, *Tell a Story in 5 Frames (Visual Storytelling)*, which does what it suggests. There are other storytelling groups on Flickr. A recent project started by Aleks Krotoski is to tell the opening 369 words of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, one word a day using photographs[42].

The rise of websites like Flickr and Photobucket is directly connected to the rise in digital photography. As Murray (2008) notes, the social use of digital photography

> …signals a shift in the engagement with the everyday image, as it has become less about the special or rarefied moments of domestic living and more about an immediate, rather fleeting, display and collection of one's discovery and framing of the small and mundane.

Day 15: Winston (http://www.flickr.com/photos/toastkid)

Murray goes on to explain that this shift has helped to alter the way that 'we construct narratives about ourselves and the world around us.' The disposability of digital images is allied with their comparative ephemerality, and with their presence in the 'every-day' (mobile phones nearly all include cameras built in), 'there is a place for both the sharp and the grainy, for the "perfect" and the imperfect.' This is another example of the blurring of lines between professional and amateur, between author and reader.

So much for imagery, but alongside the rise in digital photography is a rise in video footage. YouTube and Vimeo provide space for users to upload the bizarre, banal and distasteful along with everything in between. Much of this could be loosely termed 'storytelling' but as mentioned in earlier in Part II, Scottish storytellers do not have much of a presence on these networks. A new mini-site, Story Lab X, scrapes video sites and posts a link to a storytelling video each day[43].

YouTube and the like have spawned a new genre: the web-series. YouTube videos tend to be under eight minutes long, and series of films have been created to fit this slot, for example, *The Guild* (a sitcom about online gamers which is now in its third series) and *Ikea Heights* (a melodrama 'shot entirely in the Burbank California Ikea Store without the store knowing')[44].

Sand painting video

A final example of visual storytelling online is a YouTube clip from a Russian reality television show, an example of sand-painting to tell a story[45].

The contestant uses the sand to draw a story in a cross between silent animation and illustration. The images change quickly, layering over each other, and telling a story at the same time.

Interactive Technology & Virtual Storytelling

This final section concerns itself with interactive narrative environments which have a strong technological theme, as opposed to a cinematic, artistic or literature-based focus. These projects explore the use of new media attributes (dispersed and inherently multimodal) and the boundaries between real life and the digital world.

Penguin published *We Tell Stories*[46] online in March 2008. These six digital fictions, written by well known authors, were posted one a week for six weeks. *The 21 Steps* told a story through Google maps, locating the action in virtual and physical space. *Slice* used a set of blogs (with comments enabled so that readers could interact and contribute), *Once upon a time* used input from the viewer to personalise the story (for example, to generate character names), while *Your Place or Mine* was written live online each evening for a week.

The BBC's *A History of the World in 100 Objects*[47] series with the British Museum tells a story around individual objects, charting an overall history. It is presented on BBC's radio 4, however there is a strong Internet component, with images of the objects, transcripts, podcasts and 'listen online' available, as well as user interaction through the ability to add your own objects.

The use of social media in sharing stories and narrative has been noted by researchers (Richards, 2009, boyd et al., 2010) and an advertising agency likewise made good use of the narrative potential of Facebook. The Polish San Markos agency created two fictitious Facebook profiles and told the story of the Warsaw uprisings in World War II[48] for 63 days through the characters, as if they were happening today. Pictures, links, songs and video footage were added and the profiles attracted over 3000 friends between them.

An oft cited and researched use of interactive narrative is in computer

games and educational virtual environments. Robertson (2007) uses the popularity of video games as a tool to encourage children in their own game-making potential, learning both narrative and technical programming concepts. Montemayor & Druin (2004) created a StoryRoom for children to create and tell stories through physical programming devices; whilst Ananny's TellTale device (2002) is a simple example of bridging the digital and physical worlds, spoken story sections were recorded onto segments of a caterpillar toy, which could then be replayed and re-sequenced through reordering the caterpillar.

A burgeoning area for research and development is augmented reality (AR), where the line between the virtual and real world becomes even more blurred (e.g. Cavazza et al., 2003, explore the use of mixed reality in interactive digital storytelling). For example, Layar[49] is an AR browser for mobile phones (available on Apple's iPhone and Android phones) which displays 'real time digital information on top of reality through the camera of your mobile phone.' Perplexcity[50] was an early example of the fraying edges of the online/offline worlds, offering puzzles and games which spilled over onto the real world, culminating in a real life treasure hunt.

It is in the domains of virtual reality and Interactive Storytelling however where a real corpus of research may be found. The bi-annual ICVS (International Conference on Virtual Storytelling)and TIDSE conferences (Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment), now combined into a single, annual conference ICIDS (International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling), showcase research focal points for technological narrative applications. As may be anticipated, the perspective is technologically dominated, and story elements are heavily influenced by narratology theories and Propp's structuralism (Cavazza and Pizzi, 2006, Nakasone and Ishizuka, 2006, Cavazza et al., 2009). There are however, some indications that live storytelling qualities are being explored (for example the use of ambient sound and visuals to increase sense of presence in Brown et al., 2003). Silva et al's (2003) paper *Tell Me That Bit Again*, describes a way that interactivity and response could be incorporated digitally through live feedback. In their case study children 'post' printed image cards into a letter box underneath the display (yet again, Propp's functions are utilised here as some of the card options), which then affects the course of the story.

Conclusions

This section has shown the ways in which technology and new media are reaching out storytelling or narrative, and certainly there are many modalities and myriad ways towards achieving this, as the examples have shown[51]. However, what we must be careful of is that the technology does not dominate indiscriminately—there must be a reason for its use, i.e.;

> What online literacy must provide us, if it is to replace and not merely subvert print, is a new way of fashioning that universal narrative of human history, a new way of re-telling the ongoing tale of our collective struggle to become what we are capable of imagining, a new way of shaping that most compelling image of who we want to be.
>
> (Tuman, 1992, p. 138)

When referring to the hype surrounding virtual reality and immersive 3D environments and their uses, Robins (2000) claims that 'the imagination is dead: only the technology is new'.

The narrative examples described in the preceding pages are almost without exception based not only on Western scientific thought and narrative formalism, but on a visual and literate mindset. In contrast, Borovoy et al (2001) used the concept of folklore and community construction to explore social interactions and technology with children through mobile, programmable devices which interacted with each other.

Elizabeth Figa has attempted to truly bridge the divide between traditional, live storytelling and new media by distance learning (through video and recorded tellings). Whilst interesting, it does not bring anything radically new or improved to either the field of storytelling or new media.

Notes

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Alternative Realities: A Storyscape

The following section recounts an actual electronic storytelling experience which took place in the location described. It is constructed from fieldnotes and memory recollections from the event along with transcribed interview segments from an original videotaped interview. Story elements are taken from source recording of audio story.

THE background noise dies down as Owen adjusts the dials on the speakers and laptop.

A soft, poignant melody washes over the studio and Owen's voice comes out of the speakers. As his words begin to fill the room, I can see the form of a traveller, walking the roads with his bag of dreams, carefree, alone. The notes of his simple tune, slightly discordant, hint at the story to come. I am aware that the students sitting around me are still, and I hope that they too can see the traveller in front of them, now resting under a hawthorn tree.

The alternative reality is that of a top floor art college studio, painted white and filled with desks, swivel chairs, computers and the debris of student projects past and present. Cold January light seeps in through skylights. You may think it is perhaps not the best space from which to enter the land of stories but it does show that the doorway can be opened from anywhere. The third year design students sit gathered round the front half of the room, the lucky ones slouched on the black sofa. Owen's storyscape comes near the end of a day-long workshop on practical storytelling techniques, part of the Re-Telling module I am running to explore how storytelling and digital technology can interact.

Owen watches the laptop screen intently, making small adjustments eve-

ry so often.

The rich, verdant story landscape is untouched by town or traffic, devoid of even the incessant hum of electricity. The traveller man is running across the landscape, heavily, clumsily, but swiftly all the same. The green woman he chases runs just out of reach, leading him over hills and through trees, almost floating over the ground as she dances effortlessly in front of him. The timeless layers of harp notes weave through the landscape, shaping the contours as Owen's voice shapes the story.

I met Owen through the Dundee storytelling group, Blether Tay-gither, and he was an obvious choice to run a guest workshop for a number of reasons, not least because I consider him to be an excellent storyteller. Blether is a predominantly female group, with a tendency for storytellers to be older rather than younger and, in general, not eager adopters of technology. Owen is younger than most of the group in Blether and his background in sculpture along with his experimental soundscape storytelling made him the ideal person to introduce the basic concepts of storytelling to the students. Owen's style of telling is quite traditional, in that it is clear, understated and well paced, allowing time to watch the story unfold in your mind's eye.

I smile to myself as I remember Owen telling me about Robin Williamson and how inspirational he was. '*I listened to his work and I was blown away by it. He plays a harp and it's quite bardic, you know. It sounds like it's coming from a place back in time, beautiful stories, and I was really inspired by what he was doing*.'

It was during this interview that Owen told me about the electronic soundscapes he had created. As he explained to the students, normally the soundscapes are put together live, with the story told live too. For the purposes of this workshop and because the piece was unfinished Owen used a prerecorded version.

Days have now passed in the chase of man and woman. The man struggles on, slower now but not defeated. Yet the green lady is swifter than ever before and try as he might, it is all the traveller man can do to just keep up with her. And still the landscape rolls on relentlessly, dreamlike in its insubstantiality.

On reflection, I find myself surprised by the storyscape. It was not what I was expecting when I asked Owen if he would show the students an ex-

ample of a story soundscape. Yet I struggle to know what I was expecting. The style matches Owen's normal telling, but has a more detached edge to it; the story is more elusive, almost mythic in its ephemerality.

I think back to our conversation a few months earlier in the local arts centre.

'One of the things that I'm interested in doing is using modern technology, especially sound and music, combining it with storytelling so that there's something that people can access a bit more easily.' Owen's interest in combining electronic sounds and stories comes from a love of electronic music and a need to bridge the worlds of bardic-inspired storytelling and modern culture.

'It's a way of letting them know what storytelling is and then they can trace it back and hear what real, simple storytelling is if they want to. But I love electronic music and it's a way for me to fit in with modern culture and what my friends are into, you know. And that's electronic sounds and computers and iPods so it's a way of bringing it to them.'

Owen pauses, taking a drink of tea. The café area is getting busy and tables are being set for the evening although it's still only late afternoon.

'There's one particular festival that I go to called Solfest and you've got a big storytelling centre there, lots of storytellers and theatre groups come and do their thing. And then at night you've got a tent that's playing full on electronic music and I like that balance. There's people coming to the storytelling sessions who are going out at night to dance to the electronic music and I'd like to find that middle ground where you can bring the two together and make it work.'

Owen is the only storyteller I know, and am aware of, who actively seeks to incorporate elements of storytelling and digital media into live events or performances. However, I recall a piece of performance dance, *Sensational knowledge, Sensational Ethnography*, which explored the connections between digital and analogue. A collaboration between composer and programmer Curtis Bahn and dancer Tomie Hahn, it created electronic sounds from Tomie's dance movements. Tomie embodied traditional elements through her experience of Japanese traditional dance whilst the sensors cap-turing her movements brought 'a contemporary expressive moment.'[11]

Owen continues, 'There's electronic music that I've heard that uses tra-

ditional folk music in it. And I know quite a few people who've learned a lot about folk music because they've heard this electronic music and heard that little folk tune and then traced it back and just discovered what folk music is all about. So I'd like to do the same with storytelling.'

'Have you done that so far?' I ask.

'I've done a couple of stories where I've used my laptop with sound programs and I've mixed samples into my story live. I've done a storytelling live, you know, standing there telling it and used a laptop to bring in sounds at certain points in the story. It's more been music based but I'm looking to make it more like combining storytelling and sound art, rather than just music. So that's what I'm moving towards.'

I'm intrigued by how the audience would react to such a story, trying to imagine what the rest of the Blether Tay-gither tellers would think about it. Owen tells me of the positive response from listeners, but admits that they were festival events.

'I'd like to do the same thing to a traditional storytelling audience, people who are really into tradition, just to see how they react.' Owen smiles. 'But one festival I did it and somebody came up to me afterwards and he said, "You know, it's really good just to see something different." And that was a great comment to me because that's what I want. You know, I want them to hear something that is different, not been heard before. So, yeah, I've had a great reaction from it actually, really good.'

Owen illustrates the potential affinity of tradition and new media. He admires the bardic style of telling, with music accompanying the tale and Celtic myths, but he also wants to ground part of that tradition in contemporary contexts, distorting sounds of the harp through electronic effects and making full use of the two seemingly separate worlds.

Upon awakening underneath the original hawthorn tree, their journey come full circle, the traveller man offers a blossoming branch of hawthorn to the green-robed lady. Together, they walk into the green hills, their journey just beginning. As the last notes fade away, there is stillness in the darkening studio.

Notes

1. From http://www.arts.rpi.edu/crb/Streams/streams.htm:

   > Wearing a sensing device developed by Bahn, Hahn freely navigates a virtual sonic geography consisting of synthetic sounds and non-linear poetry. Through her movement, she is able to negotiate and control all aspects of the sonic structure of this virtual soundscape. With each gesture "Streams" recalls bodies of water and land, technology, a flow of information, transmission, and liquid states. Through technology, the performance toys with the ephemeral quality of sound and the physical memory of time, sonic space, and sensory experience.

Connections between New Media & Storytelling

> Print and electronics continue with new intensification and radical transformations the diaeretic programme initially set in motion by writing. They separate knower from known more spectacularly than writing does. Between the knower and the known print interposes elaborate mechanical contrivances and operations of a different order of complexity than writing.
>
> (Ong, 1986)

Walter J. Ong is credited with coining the term 'secondary orality', the 'electronic orality of radio and television'. New media has radically changed the way we view and interact with media; radio and television are very static by comparison—control ultimately rests in the hands of the corporations and producers. However Ong still saw fit to dub these one-to-many technologies as examples of 'secondary orality'. This secondary orality differed greatly from primary orality (i.e. pre-literacy) in that it merely deepened the division between 'knower and known', writer and reader, broadcaster and receiver. The similarities occur in the sensory modes in which information is shared, a shift away from the printed word towards images and sound.

Marshall McLuhan also adopted the notion of man returning to some kind of orality, he envisaged it as an utopian idyll free from bodily limitations;

> Men are suddenly nomadic gatherers of knowledge, nomadic as never before, free from fragmentary specialism as never before—but also in-

> volved in the total social process as never before; since with electricity we extend our central nervous system globally, instantly interrelating every human experience. (1964, p. 391)

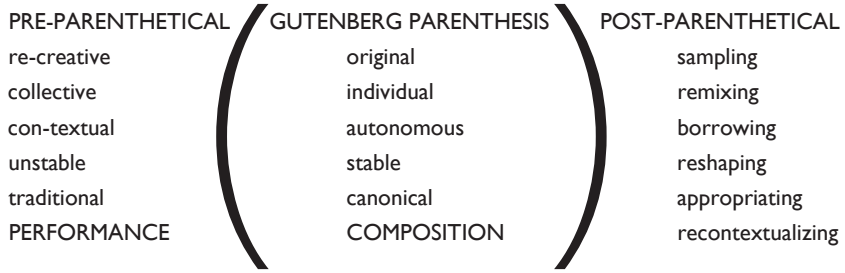
McLuhan outlined four media cultures, primary orality, hand-written literate society, print culture and 'electric media'. As may be inferred from the above quote, the sensory enhanced electronic culture is 'paradise regained' (Lister et al., 2003, p. 77). Both McLuhan and Ong agreed that electronic culture, or secondary orality, would change society in fundamental ways. The technological determinism discussed earlier (Bridge: *What is New Media?*) and the opposing arguments of McLuhan and Williams are mirrored by past debates on the implications of literacy, notably that of Street in disagreement with Goody & Watt and Ong (chapter 2). This mirroring is not surprising, literacy is a tool, a technology which has itself been subject to technological advances from the written word to the printed word.

To add another layer to the oral versus literate, determined versus determinism, polemics we have story (or *narrative*) versus information e.g. (Macintyre, 2009). Caroline Bassett sets out to prove that narrative can withstand the 'remediation of the world through information.' (2007, p.1) She notes that Benjamin felt that narrative, or storytelling, would not survive the onslaught of information. Bassett argues that narrative is contemporary and relevant because 'it is contingent and mutable, because it is changing and transforming rather than fading in response to alterations in the material conditions under which we live.' (2007, p. 3) Narrative, she claims, can reflect and respond on the forms and technologies which shape it, as well as commenting on the social and historical contexts in which it sits.

'Secondary orality' certainly seems to spark a sense of longing, a reminiscence. Robins considers the Internet to be viewed in this positive, community building light;

> The Net is seen as re-kindling the sense of family—'a family of invisible friends'. It recreates the ethos of the village pump and the town square.
>
> (Robins, 2000, quoting Rheingold)

Pettitt (2007) offers a variation on the secondary orality terminology, 'The Gutenberg Parenthesis.' Rather than primary orality it is 'pre-parenthetical', literate culture becomes 'Gutenberg Parenthesis', and post-literary or secondary orality is 'post-parenthetical.'



As can be seen from the above diagram, the connections between pre- and post- parenthetical are evident. Pettitt draws on Elizabethan 'plagiarism' where performance (i.e. in theatre) was more important than 'composition and author.'

So is there anything to be gained by developing the notion of secondary orality? The terminology is invariably linked with Ong and so carries with it a degree of the far reaching notions of technology restructuring thought and a harkening back to a golden era of mankind. When used in this thesis therefore, it will be as a reference to Ong's definition—a mode of separating the creator from the consumer using primarily non-textual means. Secondary orality however is useful in forming a starting point for discussion and for raising awareness and potential of differences and similarities between new media and 'old media'.

Reflections on Audience & Media

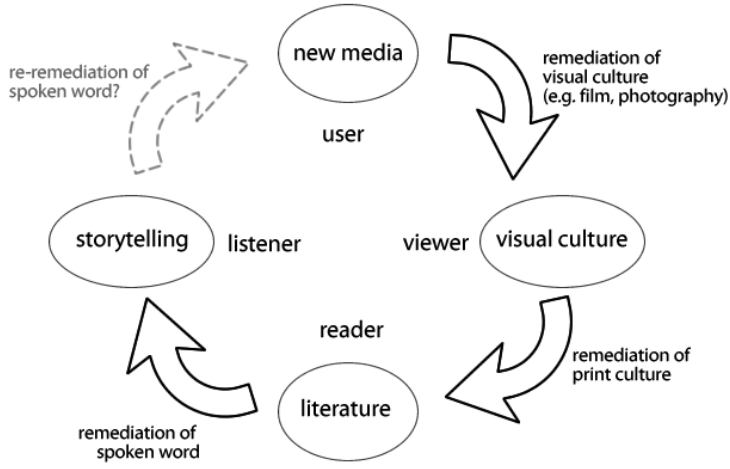
McLuhan's four ages of man has some relevance when considering the differences in the main modes of engagement of key media trends. Lister (2003, p. 21) describes the changes in interaction:

Audience for new media is 'user'
Audience for visual culture is 'viewer'
Audience for literature is 'reader', and extrapolating:
Audience for storytelling is 'listener'

It is easy to extend the concept to storytelling by adding 'listener'. Contrary to Ong and McLuhan's thesis, it is not apparent from the above list that new media has many parallels with orality, or storytelling. Neither 'listener' nor 'user' necessitate any direct interaction with media. As we have seen however, both storytelling and new media have rich interactions with and between consumers and producers and indeed many people often swap between these roles of consumer and producer. Tony Quinlan from business storytelling company Narrate describes the image of passivity which the term '*storytelling*' can conjure up, and this issue can apply equally well to '*listening*';

> Storytelling is a misnomer. It conjures up the image of a passive audience sitting listening to someone with the charismatic, persuasive power to entrance them…What is on offer here is more powerful and more positive than that simplistic view. And while it involves storytelling throughout, some of the greatest opportunities for employee engagement lie in listening to stories, not telling.
>
> (Quinlan, n.d.)

The change in type of audience engagement which comes with a change in medium is informed by and closely aligned with the remediation of media. The diagram below shows a generalised view of the remediation cycle.



The question it poses is whether the spoken word, or orality (or specifically storytelling) can be remediated *again*. The arrow is notionally directed back towards new media, completing the circle, suggesting that storytelling could be a new form or remediation of new media, which would require a transformational type of storytelling. It is more likely that the arrow should be unidirectional, denoting the complex relationship between storytelling and new media and the strands connecting them. This thesis does not further explore the possibility of the re-remediation of the spoken word or storytelling, but suggests that it is a topic for future research which could draw on ideas embodied in secondary orality for initial fodder.

Outcomes or Attributes?

In considering the attributes and commonalities between storytelling and new media, careful thought was given to the distinction between attribute and outcome. Explicitly stating the outcomes of media can quickly become problematic, sweeping statements are difficult to back up and technological determinism can be an easy trap to fall into. However, it is important to reflect even fleetingly on the perceived implications. Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2006) developed a list of new media literacies which children in the digital world need to develop and which can in some respects be considered to be outcomes of new media:

> *Play*: the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem solving
> *Performance*: the ability to adopt alternative identities for the pur-pose of improvisation and discovery
> *Simulation*: the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes
> *Appropriation*: the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
> *Multitasking*: the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details
> *Distributed Cognition*: the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities

> *Collective Intelligence*: the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal
> *Judgment*: the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources
> *Transmedia Navigation*: the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
> *Networking*: the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information
> *Negotiation*: the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

It is immediately apparent that many of these literacies correlate to the characteristics of new media and storytelling. For example, Jenkins' *collective intelligence* relates to dispersal, collective memory and co-creativity. Similarly, *play* and *performance* show connections with storytelling's performance and visual imagination, which likewise connects with the immediacy of new media.

Birkerts (1996) laments aspects of electronic culture, claiming it leads to language erosion, the loss of historical context and the 'waning of the private self' in an increasingly transparent society. By comparison, Jenkins' set of skills clearly highlights the tools required to function successfully in the age of information. Walton & Vukovic (2003) describe how 'skimming and scanning' strategies are adopted by people navigating large information spaces such as the Internet, and these skills are represented by Jenkins through *transmedia navigation* and *networking*.

There can be no denying that new media alters the physical ways we communicate, perhaps in ways unforeseen by developers, however we *are* still communicating and that is the fundamental goal of storytelling.

Connections

There are undoubtedly significant differences between new media and storytelling, but in the same way that Wilson seeks to 'draw attention to the similarities' of story-telling and theatre (2006, p. 5), my intention is

to highlight and explore the connections in storytelling and new media. Others who have noted orality in technology include Fowler (1994), and John December (1993) who found similarities between Ong's orality theories and textual CMC (computer-mediated communication), in particular bulletin board systems. December focused on identifying text indications which Ong associated with 'orality' in speech patterns. These included additive speech patterns; aggregative discourse; redundancy and copious repetition; conservative traditionalism (i.e. the presence of sages, an outcome of collective memory); the apprenticeship learning of skill and knowledge systems; antagonisms, which manifested as flaming (as orality apparently 'situates knowledge within a context of struggle'—quoting Ong); emotive behaviour, in particular the development of 'empathetic and participatory' community; and evidence of situational conversation, driven by specific context rather than abstractions. Issues with the dichotomy of oral versus literate aside (the contentious nature of which has been addressed in chapter 2), the approach taken in this research is wider and in a sense reversed from December's—focusing on the specific storytelling, 'oral culture' in the first instance and applying this secondly to a more generalised new media technological context.

Wright suggests that scholars are picking up on parallels between 'tribal societies' and online social networks, but on closer inspection it is clear that he is referring more to the new domains opened up to anthropologists through virtual communities rather than any clear and specific connections between the two fields, other than superficial social dynamics. The incomplete Pathways Project (http://pathwaysproject.org) by comparison does seek to show the connections between oral culture, written word and electronic culture through the use of three virtual agorae (marketplaces). However, despite noble intentions, the project is obviously in either its infancy or death throes, and the agorae are simply hypertext web pages with little content. They claim that,

> Despite superficial differences, both technologies are radically alike in depending not on static products but rather on continuous processes, not on "What?" but on "How do I get there?" In contrast to the fixed spatial organization of the page and book, the technologies of

> oral tradition and the internet *mime the way we think* by processing along pathways within a network. In both media it's pathways—not things—that matter.
>
> (Foley, n.d.)

The project's lead, John Miles Foley, eloquently discusses the parallel between Internet links and oral texts, claiming them as pathways or oimai in the same way that the 'maze of traditional story' is navigated;

> I have already suggested that the Homeric oimai are parallel to links on the Internet and therefore that a web or network of interrelated sites is a more apposite cognitive model for ancient Greek oral tradition than anything associated with the world of unitary, physical texts. …The song lives outside any single performance—never mind outside the reduced medium of any one recording or transcription—as a series of potentials, a network of pathways that offers innumerable options at the same time that is connects with innumerable unspoken assumptions and implicit references.
>
> (Foley, 1998, p. 21)

Robertson et al. note that

> 'The parallels between storytelling and these technologies run deep. Both are about sharing and expressing your ideas, about reaching an audience. They're based on ordinary people's passion for communication. They're about hearing everyone's voice. In fact, there's a phrase which you often see in articles about Web 2.0 which fits: "architecture of participation." It's a technical term, of course, but don't you think that's exactly what a good storyteller provides? They provide the framework, perhaps the beginning of a story. And then the architecture extends upwards and outwards as the audience members participate, add to the story and maybe tell their own stories in response. All over the web, there are stories growing and extending and reaching new people.'
>
> (2008, p. 230)

Combined with the previous discussion on secondary orality, these thoughts are helpful yet are formulated too abstractly for the purposes of this research. In order to develop a coherent means with which to explore the relationship and connections between new media and storytelling it is necessary to reflect on the previously defined sets of characteristics for both:

New Media

1. Digitality
2. Multimodality
3. Immediacy
4. Dispersal
5. Co-creativity
6. Ephemerality

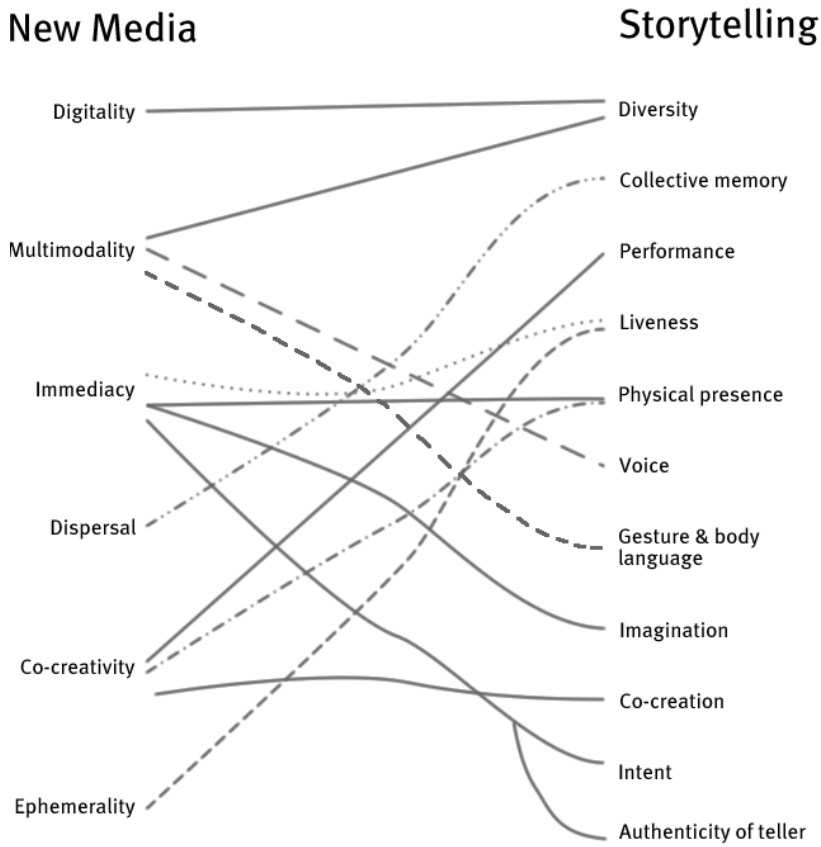
Storytelling

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles
2. Collective memory
3. Performance
4. Liveness
5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination
9. Connection between story, teller and listener (co-creation)
10. Intentional desire by teller and group to share stories
11. Authenticity of the teller

If we force a best-fit correlation between the two sets, ensuring that every characteristic in each is mapped against one or more characteristic in the other set, then the resultant set of connections looks something like the diagram on the page overleaf.

From this mapping we can see that *digitality* (the underlying technological structures which enable new media objects to be easily accessed, manipulated and remoulded) has a connection with *diversity*. Digitality enables the malleability of new media, which leads to multimodality and the diverse nature of new media. *Diversity* is present in both new media and storytelling. The range of modes with which information can be represented in new media and emerging genres (for example twitter fiction and fanfic-tion, YouTube channels and reality television programmes) as well as the variety of amateur and professional content available on sites such as Flickr demonstrates this. It is closely paralleled by the range of storytelling styles, the use of voice, gesture and body language (including dance and

musical elements). This diversity can be considered in three aspects, the modal diversity (of text, video, gestures and vocal range for instance), the content diversity (of genres, parodies and stories) and style diversity (the personal interpretation of stories). *Multimodality* is also directly connected with diversity, and encompasses the range of modes in storytelling, the use of *voice*, *gesture* & *body language*.



Another similarity between storytelling and new media is in their common aim to *transport*. Storytelling endeavours to take the listeners into the realm of the imagination, especially visual imagination—there is a sense of deep engagement between the story, the teller and the listener herself. The

immediacy sought by many kinds of new media (the double logic of remediation discussed by Bolter & Grusin, 1999) also seeks to transport. The user becomes *immersed* in the landscape represented, opening a windowed space between the worlds represented and physically existing. *Immediacy* in storytelling is achieved through a number of ways, *intent* and *authenticity* of teller go a long way in not only establishing credibility in the minds of listeners but add to the engagement of *imagination* which is critical in transporting the listener. Finally, the physical *presence* of the teller and the *live* experience of the teller contribute to the immediacy of a live telling.

The connection between *distribution* or *dispersal* of content through collective memory on the one hand and distributed technology on the other is another clear connection between storytelling and new media. This trait has its role to play in the malleability of content (which includes mutation of story). Even though many story sources today may be adapted from the written word, they are passed on and referenced from many oral tellings too. The knowledge of story sources becomes distributed as well as the actual content of stories.

Social media has been a buzzword for some time now and indeed the social, communicative element of new media cannot be ignored. As outlined earlier, *co-creativity* is an attribute of new media and the intentional desire by storytellers and listeners to share stories is necessary for oral storytelling to continue. The increased levels of interaction inherent in new media bring a closer connection between author and reader. Fundamentally storytelling is about communication and much of new media development and applications are focused on that goal (e.g. viral marketing).

Storytelling, it is claimed is attractive for two main reasons, the '*I could never do this*' admiration and the '*I could do this*' feeling. This reflects the twin spheres of traditional storytelling, that of court and hearth (Haggarty, 1996)—the professional performance storyteller and the amateur ceilidh storyteller. New media, it would appear, is attracting a similar divide, it is enabling people who want to create and have the '*I could do this*' mentality whilst still having scope for the professional producers. This is a complete shift in thinking from the domination of mass media, where to become a published author or film director was to beat the odds, requiring backing from publishers, literary agents and secure financial backing. Now anyone can (and often does) publish electronically and can even print whole books

through sites like Lulu.com.

The fleeting nature of storytelling through the liveness of oral tales is redolent of the *ephemerality* of new media, although admittedly the time spans are not equal. Once told, stories linger in the memories of listeners for some time. Nevertheless, new media objects tend to be more fixed than live storytelling, however live debates and conferences are increasingly streamed online, with input welcomed from online participants in the form of questions and comments. This *transience*, a result of the shift to digitisation for new media, enables the creation of alternative versions of content, which becomes malleable as it is reinterpreted time and time again. These myriad versions of content raise issues of truth, validity, trust and identity. Storytelling has suffered from these issues too (see chapter 8.3), the ability to identify and validate a reputable source is vital when dealing with new media.

Even with this set of relatively crudely drawn connections between new media and storytelling it is apparent that correlations are indeed present. The following *Lens for Reflection* section offers a more comprehensive treatment of the connections, representing commonalities and distinctions across a continuum.

Developing a Lens for Reflection

In order to consider the storytelling attributes of new media objects (particularly those seeking to include narrative elements) it is necessary to utilise a more formalised approach. Due to the diversity both in new media and storytelling, it is impossible to simply compare and contrast new media objects ad-hoc, therefore a framework was developed which draws on multiple knowledge bases and acts as an overlay, or lens, with which to evaluate and break down the components of each project.

This bespoke methodology not only draws out existing qualities in new media–storytelling objects but functions as a tool for reflection by showing a range of possible directions for future iterations of the objects. This lens provides a means to view such new media–storytelling objects across both digital and traditional domains.

Scenario of Use

The lens for reflection is intended not only for the specific case study in Part III but is also designed to be used in the wider fields of new media and storytelling. To illustrate this, chapter 15 additionally uses the framework to examine four contemporary new media applications.

It is anticipated that the framework would be of most interest to new media designers and developers who are keen to incorporate narrative elements into immersive new media contexts. (This may include developers of social media and interactive narrative authors and artists.) As the Bridge *Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling* section noted, it is apparent that most virtual or digitally realised storytelling envi-

ronments have little grounding in, or awareness of, traditional storytelling concepts. 'Storytelling' in these digital spaces largely reference the written or printed word, even when they hail from an educational standpoint.

However, as this thesis has shown, oral storytelling and new media have surprisingly close ties—more similarities than between new media and the immutable, printed, paper-bound word. Yet both the written story and the verbally told story seek to *share the tale*, albeit through very different mechanisms. Therefore, the principles of oral storytelling and new media as portrayed in the lens for reflection would be of significant importance when story or narrative is embedded in new media, thereby ensuring that both content and form have been carefully considered to best enrich the storytelling experience.

The framework may also hold particular resonance for a second audience, namely the storytelling community. The lens notes the similarities between new media and storytelling which may have an intriguing and reassuring impact on tellers. Whilst tellers do not necessarily abhor technology, as discussed in chapter 10, there is not a general perception of a natural affinity existing between the two worlds. Storytellers keen to promote their tales or brand online would benefit from examining or applying the framework to their online presence. For example, a comparison between a live telling and a YouTube version of the tale might provide insight into alternative avenues to explore.

Aside from those two main audiences, other groups with specific needs may find the reflection lens a useful tool. Oral historians, folklorists, tradition bearers and indigenous communities are increasingly turning to electronic means of preservation and dissemination[1]. The framework may offer fruitful reflection on appropriate alternative ways of representing oral tradition.

Benefits of the Reflection Tool

The framework draws on the stories presented so far in this thesis, considering the culture of storytelling and the culture of new media and building upon the characteristics derived from both, using them as a base marker. As has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, these characteristics have been established by both empirical work and referenced sources. Ground-

ed in this dual-context, the framework builds on the combined knowledge of many and can objectively provide a means for re-evaluating new media-storytelling objects.

Outline of Framework

The framework is represented as a continuum or spectrum ranging from new media to storytelling. The mapped correlations of new media and storytelling described previously will form the basis of the framework. But which of these connections based on similarities yield the most useful parameters in assessing the storytelling qualities of new media objects? Let us focus on the connections from the less numerous new media attributes for our discussion (recall that every characteristic of storytelling is mapped against at least one new media attribute, therefore both sets will be taken account of).

- Diversity, present in both new media and storytelling, is abstractly true of both, but when considering individual objects diversity becomes rather meaningless. That is, diversity only truly becomes apparent when reflecting on the cultural attributes of new media and storytelling. Therefore, for the overlapping middle segment of the framework spectrum diversity will be excluded.

- Multimodality succumbs to a similar fate—whilst it may be present in a single new media object (e.g. a hypermedia file with text, links, images and video), it is generally a wider attribute.

- Immediacy is a key goal of both storytelling and new media. The aim to *transport* the user or listener is fundamental. *Transportation* will be used as a parameter rather than immediacy (this is due to new media connotations of immediacy, biasing it against storytelling).

- Dispersal, akin to collective memory in some respects, is again an abstract quality of new media, not necessarily present in specific instances and so does not feature in this middle spectrum segment. For example, Twitter could be said to show dispersed qualities through access points via mobile phones or physically tethered desktop com-

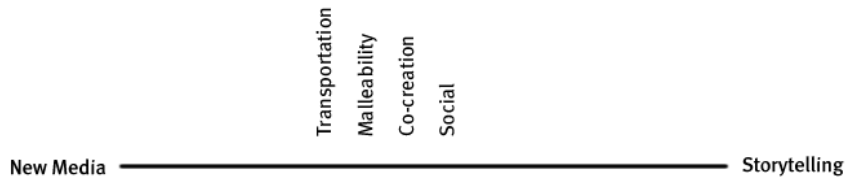
puters and physical artefacts like Tweetbookz (a physical book printed of your tweets).

- *Co-creativity*, as the previous discussion shows, maps closely between new media and storytelling, therefore it is an important and a key attribute in assessing the storytelling qualities of new media objects.

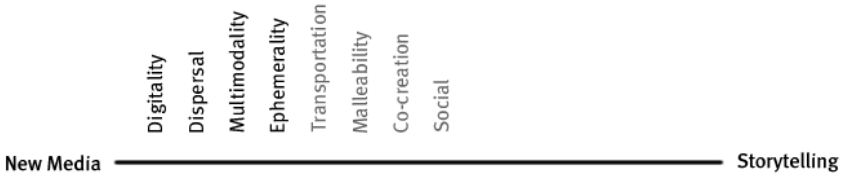
- Ephemerality, the transient, fleeting nature which comes from live events in storytelling and the intrinsic editable quality of new media also map closely. *Malleability* is a more useful term, as especially in new media, changes may be slower, and also conveys the ability of live storytelling to adapt during the telling.

So with all the mapped attributes considered, are there any other commonalities which have yet to be identified? An obvious connection not listed is implicit in storytelling and in elements of new media: the social nature of interactive engagement. Storytelling is inherently social as the interview anecdotes and reflections in Part II described, and although new media objects are not necessarily social (that is, involve interaction and collaboration with other users) the ever popular social media definitely is (e.g. Facebook, bebo, MySpace, tagged, Nuzizo, the list goes on). Therefore social is a key, yet unspoken attribute of both storytelling and new media and should be noted explicitly as a parameter in the reflection tool.

The four parameters from these connections form the middle section on a spectrum of new media-storytelling attributes like so;



Let us now consider the left hand side of the continuum, new media. The Bridge *Characteristics of New Media* gave us six characteristics, namely, digitality, multimodality, immediacy, dispersal, co-creativity and ephemerality. Immediacy is already covered in the common traits above, therefore does not need to be replicated here. Similarly, co-creativity is also contained in the middle spectrum band. Thus, adding our remaining new media characteristics, the spectrum now looks like this:



As stated earlier (chapter 9) the definition of storytelling provided eleven characteristics (diversity of stories and storytelling styles, collective memory, performance, liveness, physical presence of teller, voice, gesture and body language, engagement of imagination, connection between story, teller and listener i.e. co-creation, intentional desire by teller and group to share stories and authenticity of the teller). In the same fashion as the new media characteristics, co-creation is already accounted for. Diversity, as noted earlier, is a generalisation of storytelling, noted across a series of live tellings rather than in a single storytelling or teller. There is therefore no need to include diversity as a parameter here. Engagement of imagination is encompassed in the middle band's 'transportation' and serves no use in duplication. Intent in storytelling, whilst crucial, is by necessity always present in any kind of storytelling. As it is assumed that any application of this framework will be angled at narrative or storytelling environments, ensuring that intent will always be there, it has also been excluded from this spectrum of parameters. In a similar manner, authenticity of teller, whilst important, is not only very difficult to assess without knowing background information about teller or primary creator, but it is connected with immediacy or transportation. It is assumed the issues of authenticity are covered as part of transportation.

The complete spectrum is now:

Making Use of the Spectrum

Now that the parameters have been established, their use as a reflection tool can be defined. As mentioned earlier, this framework is not designed to be a prescriptive tool, rather to offer a means of further design discussion, potentially leading to prototype iteration. One of the main reasons for this is down to the continuous nature of the spectrum—a reflection on the complex and shifting relationship between new media and storytelling, it is decidedly analogue rather than discrete. In addition, the parameters vary along their own vertical scale, signifying the extent to which each one is realised.

But a key question remains, how can the framework be applied? The existence of each characteristic can be resolved by the means of the following list of questions. The answers fall into a 0-3 range, from 'no presence' to 'completely realised.'

Digitality: Does the object have digital components, i.e. is it electronically discrete, modular, and use digital data structures in any way?
0 – not at all
1 – a little
2 – to some extent
3 – very much so

Dispersal: Does the object distribute itself across either users, computer networks or geographically?
0 – no (e.g. kiosk terminal in retail store)
1 – minimally

2 – to some extent
3 – very much (e.g. Geocaching, treasure hunting game using GPS)

Multimodality: Does the object use a range of modes to interact with users? (E.g. sound, visual, tactile, or text, photography, video).
0 – no, only one mode
1 – two modes
2 – three modes
3 – four or more

Ephemerality: How permanent is the object and/or its content?
0 - fairly permanent (e.g. mobile phone life spans)
1 – slow change
2 – medium change
3 – changing rapidly (e.g. Real-time feed on Twitter)

Transportation: How successful is the object in transporting the user or listener? I.e. does it provide an immersive, engaging experience? (N.B. This quality is difficult to quantify)
0 – not at all (e.g. badly designed webpage, perhaps like http://arngren.net)
1 – minimally
2 – to some extent
3 – very successful (e.g. virtual reality, 3D films, SecondLife, storytelling)

Malleability: Does the object present itself in such a way as to be easily manipulated by either the primary creator (e.g. storyteller) or by end users?
0 – not at all (e.g. online video playback such as BBC iPlayer)
1 – within set parameters (e.g. interactive narrative, Penguin's WeTellStories)
2 – in defined but wide parameters (e.g. ability to annotate audio and imagery in VoiceThreads)
3 – completely (e.g. virtual worlds such as Second Life)

Co-creation: Does the object explore the dynamics of co-creation by allowing the user to create and reuse the object with others?
0 – not at all (e.g. Google ebooks)
1 – a little
2 – to some extent
3 – completely (e.g. Creative commons audio, video, books, leading to mashups)

Social: Does the object incorporate and encourage social interaction amongst users?
0 – no (e.g. interactive narratives)
1 – a little (e.g. ability to comment on YouTube and blogs)
2 – to some extent (e.g. Twitter – retweeting tweets and @replying to users)
3 – yes (e.g. Facebook)

Collective Memory: Does the object encourage the tacit sharing of stories and knowledge across its members/users?
0 – not at all
1 – a little
2 – to some extent
3 – yes (e.g. storytelling, Wikipedia articles drawing on collective knowledge)

Performance: Does the object embed a performative element in it for the primary creator or end user?
0 – no
1 – a little (e.g. Twitter, composing of tweets)
2 – to some extent (e.g. VoiceThreads)
3 – yes (e.g. YouTube, role play in Second Life)

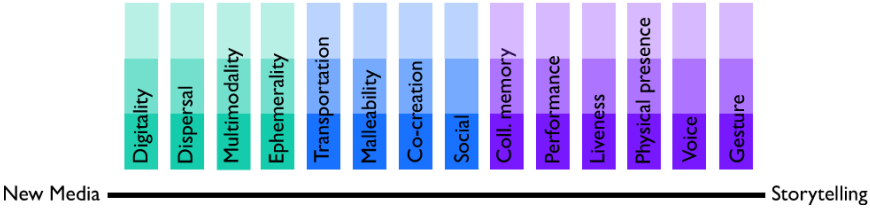
Liveness: Is the object a unique live event?
0 – not (e.g. static website)
1 – a little (e.g. blog or wiki)
2 – to some extent (e.g. real-time Twitter feed)
3 – yes (e.g. storytelling, Second Life events)

Physical Presence: Does the object have or make use of a physical presence (normally of the primary creator, e.g. storyteller)?
0 – not at all
1 – a little (e.g. touch screen interface of an iPhone)
2 – to some extent
3 – yes (e.g. storytelling)

Voice: Does the object make full use of audio and the power of voice?
0 – not at all (e.g. pure text interface and content)
1 – a little (e.g. ambient sound)
2 – to some extent (e.g. supplementary audio file with additional transcript)
3 – yes (e.g. podcasts, AudioBoo)

Gesture: Does the object make use of gesture and/or body language?
0 – not at all
1 – a little (e.g. iPhone, MS Surface touch screen interactions)
2 – to some extent (e.g. SixthSense prototype with gestural recognition)
3 – yes (e.g. storytelling)

Visually this framework and the replies to the questions can be codified into a single diagram;



Summary

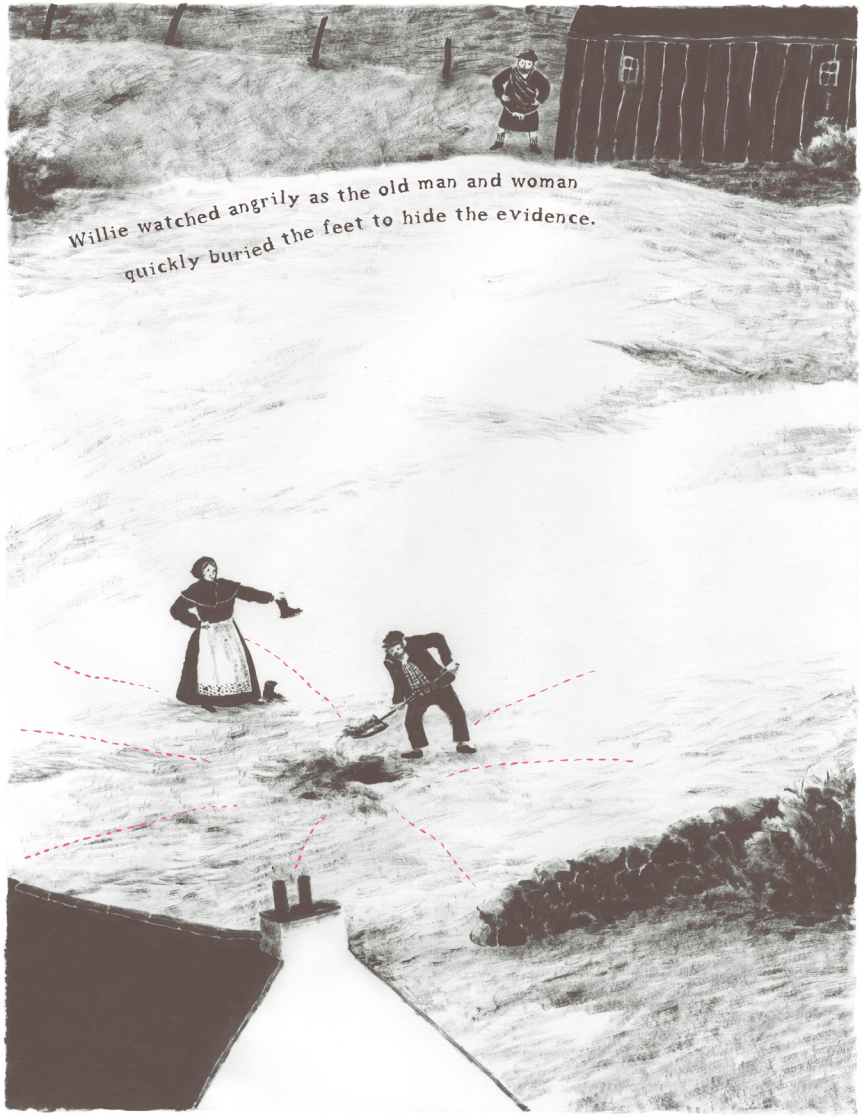
The Bridge section has developed a coherent definition of new media and debated and discussed its core attributes. This list of characteristics was then cross-referenced with the storytelling characteristics from Part II, chapter 9, and used to generate a theoretical lens for reflection, which can be applied to new media objects which have narrative intent. Correspondingly, this framework will be adopted in the following section (Part III) when considering a set of hybrid storytelling–new media projects.

In addition, the Bridge has shown numerous examples of how technology and narrative are actively combining. This brief review demonstrates how much the field relies on the written word as inspiration and content, and shows clearly the distinctive approach adopted in this research, when approaching the field of new media from a traditional storytelling perspective.

Notes

1. For example: Living Cultural Storybases (http://storybases.org).

Part III:
Creating
and Exploring
Connections


Willie watched angrily as the old man and woman
quickly buried the feet to hide the evidence.

Part II explored the world of traditional storytelling in Scotland, describing the culture and ethos of storytelling. It also outlined the key characteristics of storytelling. The preceding Bridge section considered new media, its scope and its characteristics. Some reflection was offered on the connections between storytelling and new media with specific reference to these sets of characteristics.

In contrast, Part III details a case study situated in the two worlds of tradition and technology. An overview and background of the case study is presented along with a set of detailed results which make use of the framework developed in the previous Bridge section.

Chapter 11
The Re-Telling

The previous Bridge section established that there are overlaps between traditional storytelling and new media. This section builds upon these overlaps to explore how inherently traditional storytelling qualities can be transposed into the digital realm. That is, can truly hybridised digital–traditional storytelling experiences be created?

Burgeoning designers were introduced to the core principles of storytelling, experiencing it as listeners, tellers, and through reflection. They were asked to respond to a traditional tale, using whatever form of digital technology they felt was appropriate. The results not only validate the connections between new media and storytelling, but suggest the application of reflection tool which could be utilised when developing technology-enhanced storytelling environments.

11.1 A Case Study Overview

In a wide sense, storytelling and technology have a history of interaction (for example the film industry), however when examining the more specific relationship of traditional storytelling and digital media it is helpful to consider a real world example. A substantive case study conducted with undergraduate design students serves as a vehicle to explore the relevance of storytelling in contemporary society and to consider how aspects of traditional storytelling may be transposed into digital culture. The case study is an example of an exploratory approach to research-led teaching, aimed at de-fining the links and conflicts between the worlds of traditional storytelling and new media. Through directly exposing students to the culture of practising traditional storytellers, students were encouraged to design

with real end users in mind and to engage with core and emerging ideas of story and storytelling.

The 'Retelling' module took place in semester 2, 2007-08 with twenty-three third year students on the University of Dundee's BSc in Interactive Media Design. It centred around the primary assignment of individual projects to 'retell' or reinterpret the same traditional Scottish folktale using some element of digital media. Although the content was fixed (in terms of the actual tale to be told) the medium of presentation was, by contrast, set free, as students were allowed to determine the extent and type of digital technology they employed.

The aims of the empirical research and teaching requirements were to

- Encourage independent learning, and
- To explore the application of storytelling traits in a digital context.

The risk that all twenty-three students would produce very similarly styled work was pre-empted and minimised by constraining the narrative, thus diverting creativity away from the content towards the medium and encouraging a sense of ownership of the story (making the story your own and being comfortable in its retelling is an important concept in Scottish storytelling).

The module was kick-started by an evening of storytelling in a local pub led by Scottish traveller Jess Smith and supported by other local storytellers. This was the first time that many of the students had experienced live storytelling and it proved to be a powerful way to introduce the strengths and diversity of stories and storytelling in a natural, informal environment. This event was followed by a series of workshops designed to tease out research data, whilst giving students first hand experience of telling stories, through both traditional and digital means. Visiting storytellers helped not only in the practical 'how to tell a story' way but by explaining characteristics of telling (e.g. the uniqueness of a telling—no story is told the same twice). After this intensive immersion into the world of storytelling, students were asked to develop their response to the main brief (see appendix C for module guide), which culminated in a mini-festival 'Timeless Tales', where the students presented their work at the end of the semester. The festival revealed a rich tapestry of hybridised new media storytellings, showing the extent to which students had connected with the ideas surrounding storytelling. While some projects had focused on the reinterpre-

tation of the story (e.g. setting in a modern context), others had focused on the application device (e.g. a concept for an iPod interactive story) while others created storytelling aids (e.g. digital shadows and a digital campfire) in a bid to directly merge digital technology and storytelling.
The responses to the brief should be understood as a type of early prototyping or conceptual design; an output of a thinking process rather than full commercial products. Reframing the storytelling experience in terms of mode of expression rather than content encourages increased creativity and focus on generic traits of storytelling, and could provide a model for driving idea generation of novel interfaces between both human and machine, and storyteller and technology.

11.2 Aims of the Study

This case study sought to explore the connections between traditional storytelling and new media, whilst of particular interest was the possibility of transposing intrinsically storytelling qualities (such as the presence of a teller) into a digital realm. Throughout the module, I was careful not to enforce my own theories of storytelling to the students, instead hoping that through observation and participation students would pick up on important aspects of storytelling.

The basic module structure was as follows:

1. Provide students with experience of traditional storytelling (both through observation and participation)
2. Allow and direct reflection on the qualities of traditional storytelling (i.e. developing an understanding of the nature and culture of storytelling)
3. Provide time, space and guidance to generate digital-traditional storytelling hybrids.

As this case study was an example of research-led teaching, the aims of the research aspects had to be married with teaching aims and requirements, yet the two sets of aims were not incompatible. The key to successfully creating a mutually beneficial research and learning environment (i.e. a meaningful student experience whilst still generating core research data) was

the maximising and creation of opportunities for research data gathering and student reflection points.

In terms of teaching, the main aim was to develop a greater degree of learner autonomy; extending students' critical reflection skills whilst giving them the chance to explore fundamental aspects of storytelling (in its loosest sense storytelling is crucial to design, as demonstrated by the need to interpret and create stories of the design concept for the client/designer relationship). Prior to this module, most of the student projects were group assignments. Historically (on the IMD degree), the second semester third year module is an individually undertaken project designed to provide experience for the final fourth year honours project.

So the aims of the teaching project were;

- To encourage independent learning
- To develop critical reflection skills to inform students' future work
- To give students an insight into the culture of storytelling through participating in and observing oral storytelling
- To allow students to explore fundamental aspects of storytelling
- To give students a real world opportunity to practice user centred design techniques (through strong links with the local storytelling community).

The primary research aim of the case study was to explore the application of storytelling, as inspired by oral storytelling, in a digital context. A secondary research aim was to triangulate participant observations I made on the nature of storytelling with the students' observations on storytelling, whilst being aware that the initial starting points and period of immersion into the culture for both were different.

11.3 Data Gathering

Data from the module was collected in a variety of ways, through text, video and audio. This can be summarised as follows:

- Written field notes by myself,
- Prompted written worksheets completed by students,
- Video data of workshops and final festival,
- Student blogs (each student was asked to keep a project blog, which

was part of their final assessment), this was hypermedia so could include text, images and hyperlinks.
- Photo documentation of workshops,
- Interviews with students after the module was completed. In addition, several storytellers involved in the project were also asked for a follow-up interview to get their feedback on the digital–storytelling projects.

11.4 Participants

Students

As noted earlier, the study involved students from University of Dundee. Students were third year undergraduates on the BSc Interactive Media Design (IMD) degree course. This interdisciplinary course gives students a grounding in both computing and design, so they have a good range of technical skills (including programming, web development, Flash and interactive sensors), creative thinking tools (e.g. mindmapping) and a working knowledge of design processes (including user-centred design). The case study formed a compulsory module, 'The Re-telling', taking place during the second semester of 2007-08 with twenty-three third year students.

Out of these twenty-three students, eight were female and fifteen male. Most of the students were aged between twenty and twenty-one. For all students English was their first language (most of the students were Scottish or Irish). Previous to this module, the vast majority of work had been in the form of group projects, some involving the creation of physical installations (e.g. MoLi[1]) and so there was a good history of peer collaboration and socialising.

The Re-telling was taught largely through a mentoring approach in the third years' IMD studio, in the form of interactive workshops, reflection sessions and through individual tutorials (with additional tutorials arranged when requested by individual students). This approach lends itself to self-directed learning, with a high level of respect for students and with similarities to participative, co-design methodologies.

Storytelling Community

Apart from the students, other participants in the study were members of the local storytelling community. As Part II has amply demonstrated, as an active and founding member of the local group, I was able to approach tellers and establish an early relationship between them and the project. Three storytellers came in to the studio on separate occasions, two for workshops and one for a supervision session to give feedback on students' ideas. Five storytellers took part in the opening evening of the module, and the final festival 'Timeless Tales' sparked a lot of interest amongst the storytelling community, with several tellers coming along to see the students' projects.

Ethics

Students were asked to complete an informed consent form and an IP form (see appendix D). All students completed the IP form, however two did not complete the consent form and so any data relating to them has not been used. (Neither of these students submitted a final project for assessment.) Ethical guidelines for empirical work were approved and followed in accordance with the School of Computing Ethical Committee. Consequently, all student names used have been changed to protect anonymity (see chapter 3.6 for a discussion on the ethical procedure adopted for this research).

11.5 Module Outline

The module ran from January to May 2008 and was allocated one day a week time-slot. However, the first week was an intensive session with three days worth of teaching. The structure of the module can be seen in appendix C.

Students were asked to complete two assessed deliverables for submission in weeks 5 and 13. The first assessment was a project pitch of their idea, with an accompanying image to illustrate it and a Gantt chart to show their intended progress for the rest of the module. The second assessment was an individual demonstration and presentation of their final project to three assessors (members of staff). The final marks also took into account

individual blogs which students were required to complete to document their progress through the module.

11.6 Outline of results

Out of the twenty-three students who took the module, twenty-one completed it and submitted final assessments. The twenty-one projects can be somewhat crudely considered to have focussed on either the story itself (perhaps in rewriting it, for example setting the tale in a modern context, creating story paths, or creating additional back-ground stories) or storytelling culture (e.g. picking up on an attribute of storytelling such as gesture or emotion). The storytelling culture projects can then be subdivided into hybrid-performance pieces or attribute focussed.

Summaries of the projects and their categories are below:

Story-focussed (mainly presented through conventional screen-based media)

- Interactive gameshow
- Concept video for interactive stories on ipods
- Four short films (one of which was designed as a film trailer)
- An animation
- A short machinima
- Interactive educational device designed for use in schools with read-aloud script and on-screen still images
- A purely audio soundscape
- An advertising phone booth (purely audio)

(11 examples)

Storytelling Attribute focussed (often through physical media as an installation)

- Points of view/empathy through story (in the form of physical, tactile puppets)
- Emotional storytelling (research project investigating memory and emotion in story)
- Physical presence of storyteller
- An audio-photographic installation
- Website inviting musicians to respond to the story by creating music

inspired by it
- Collective memory animation where users are shown one section of the story and must retell it to others and so work out the entire story through traditional telling.

(6 examples)

Storytelling Performance Aid
- Digital shadow hybrid with traditional teller
- An environmental aid in the form of a digital campfire
- Interactive image augmentation aid (drawing on uniqueness of each tale rendition)

(3 examples)

Other
- Graphic digital tapestry animation

(1 example)

The results and findings will be discussed and illustrated in more detail in chapter 14, however it is fair to say that the list above highlights the incredible diversity generated from the creative catalyst of a single traditional Scottish folktale.

The extent of 'storytelling attribute–based' projects indicates a depth of understanding from the students of the core values of storytelling. Several students felt that traditional storytelling could not be bettered and so their projects attempted to aid or augment the art form rather than replace it. In many cases technology was applied in a thoughtful manner. The presence of storytellers on the module was beneficial not only for their expertise but for the opportunity they afforded students to engage with people they could view as clients, giving a practical example of user–centred design.

It is interesting to note that none of the students opted for using conventional digital storytelling or interactive narratives (either in the form of gaming environments or personal computer screen-based interactions). It would hard to pinpoint exactly why this is the case, as it is a relatively small case study with many variables, yet a few tentative suggestions can be made.

Students had experience of creating physical installation-style pieces of group work and so would consider this type of interactivity as an obvious and achievable alternative to screen-based 'click and point' interfaces. Therefore, perhaps the concept of game-centred or interactive narratives were not appealing or novel as a presentation mechanism.

The nature of the project brief was deliberately wide in its scope. The format for final presentation was left open yet it was always clear that it would take place in a set time and place, i.e. exhibition. There was no requirement for online sharing; the projects could be one-off performances.

The students took on board the essential quality of traditional storytelling, that of human-to-human communication, so were more creative in their search for effective digital retellings of the tale. Consequently, technology was not simply 'thrown' at the story, but meaningfully considered and only applied to the required and necessary level.

Notes

1. MoLI (The Museum of Lost Interactions)—http://imd.dundee.ac.uk/moli is a group assignment undertaken by IMD undergraduates as group projects to 'recreate' interaction devices which may have occurred in the past. Accessed 3 March 2010.

Chapter 12
The Re-Telling: Processes

STORYTELLING is a unique event. There are too many variables in a complex system to allow perfect reproduction of a story rendition. This is its beauty and its illusion of simplicity. The case study presented in this chapter is also a unique event. Like storytelling, there are too many variables in a complex environment to allow a repeatable experiment. The choice of story undoubtedly impacts on the conceptual ideas, a different set of students with different social groupings would respond differently and so too would storytellers. This inimitable quality of the research is simply characteristic of qualitative research. (See chapter 3 and part IV for more thoughts on validity and qualitative research.) This chapter clarifies the process of the module for the case study, detailing the storytelling-centric approach, and student reactions to this.

12.1 A Note on Methods

Computer systems design has developed over the years and correspondingly generated (and appropriated) a gamut of design frameworks and methods far too numerous to attempt to include here. A core approach however is user-centred design (UCD), with leading proponents including Alan Cooper and Donald Norman (Norman, 1998). The underlying principle of UCD is that the user plays a key role and all design decisions are referred back to the user model. The degree to which end users are actively involved in the actual design process varies; from intensive participatory design techniques, contextual design (where users are observed and questioned in typical application settings, i.e. in *context*), scenario design

(Benyon and Macaulay, 2002, Bødker, 2000, Carroll, 2000), and newer rapid prototyping and agile development (where working software versions are prioritised, to be upgraded in the next rapid development cycle).

Cooper advocates the use of personas as a way of conceptualising and aggregating data about users. Personas are fictitious characters with names, likes and dislikes, and are designed to represent an archetypal user whose requirements must be met if the project is to succeed. Cooper's *The Inmates are Running the Asylum* (2004) made the technique popular and one of the original aims was to personalise users for programmers and engineers to raise awareness of the end user as a real person, that is, to prevent coders from designing software for themselves (i.e. an advanced, technical 'guru' user). Personas should be based on real user research and are a means of codifying this data in an easy to understand format, suitable for both programmers and non-technical managers. Despite early popularity however, personas are subject to criticism. Time consuming to create (although much of this time is spent on gathering user data), their real value is being increasingly questioned (Chapman and Milham, 2006).

Contextual Inquiry (Beyer and Holtzblatt, 1998) is a method of gathering user data in context (often in a workplace environment) to create a "shared interpretation" between designer and user. Direct observation of the user creates a new viewpoint and allows the designer to assess how people work, is it really in a task-oriented manner or something more random? How can these results be translated to the design? Contextual inquiry draws on ethnographic techniques of observing people in natural settings and is based around the theory that what people say they do isn't how they act in reality. This is not necessarily an attempt to deliberate mislead but could be a result of unconsciousness of actions, saying what they think researchers want to hear, and an inability to vocally externalise tasks which are instinctive. Contextual inquiry therefore focuses on directed interviews undertaken in the workplace along with observation.

Originating in Scandinavia (Muller and Kuhn, 1993), Participatory Design, as the name suggests, focuses on design of an artefact rather than the purely contextual nature of true ethnography. Participants or users are considered co-designers in an iterative cycle of prototyping and evaluation. Spinnlzi (2000) notes that although participatory design is an empowering, relatively inexpensive tool, it 'focuses on iteratively improving exist-

ing artifacts', i.e. leading to incremental as opposed to innovative changes.

Other participatory methods include participatory research (PR) and participatory action research (PAR). PR is typically characterised by shared ownership of research projects with community-based analysis of social problems, conducted in developing countries by urbanites working in rural conditions. It has suffered criticism for lacking 'scientific rigour, confusing social activism and community development with research' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). PAR is similarly associated with social research and invokes a dual thought process between external researcher and insider knowledge, in this sense similar to ethnography. Greenwood et al (1993) argue that the extent of participation in PAR projects is emergent and depends on the possibilities offered by each research project and that the research itself 'emerges over time as a process'. PAR is a cyclical process, a 'spiral of cycles of self-reflection (planning, acting and observing, reflecting, replanning, and so on)' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). The involvement of participants in these methodologies is key to grounding the research to the social context, both in specific and cultural setting.

The methodology students adopted for their projects was left up to them, however a user centred design approach had been taught at earlier levels, and many of the students tried to use the early conversations with storytellers to inform their conceptual ideas.

12.2 The Generic Approach: Experiential-Expert Focus

Key to the methodology used in the case study were meaningful interactions between expert and designer (in this case, storyteller and designer). A low-tech approach was adopted in the initial stages, in part due to the difference in technical skills between the two groups, but also to facilitate natural human communication and to re-engage designers and developers with story. Digital technology was only truly considered at a later stage. There is substantial value to be taken from this approach beyond the output results, that is, it is a kind of interactive, physical 'brainstorming' exercise, in-tended to open up and challenge conventional ways of thinking by bringing designers and developers back into direct contact with experts in the traditional, non-technological field.

The overall aims of this approach are;

1. To create new ways to think about the problem area (in the context of this case-study it is technologically enabled storytelling)
2. To fully understand the importance of storytelling in the design process.

The main stages of the approach are as follows:

1. *Experience*

This first stage is to gain some firsthand experience of the skills the expert group has through observation (for example observing and being part of a storytelling evening which includes the telling of traditional tales, anecdotes and music).

2. *Reflection*

Designers/developers as a group reflect on the culture experienced in stage 1, attaching importance to thinking about how the fields could work together and what each could gain from the other (e.g. traditional storytelling and digital media). See chapter 13 for details & results.

3. *Participant-observation*

Designers work with experts in non-threatening workshop environments discovering and experimenting with new skills and techniques gaining an insight and appreciation of the main challenges and skills commanded by the expert group.

4. *Idea Generation & Prototyping*

Only now do designers begin to think about ways of combining the two fields, e.g. storytelling and technology. Initial work begins on constructing prototypes to answer the brief. In the case study described later, this process was guided by the constraint of a brief which defined a traditional tale to be told (each designer/group had the same tale) but left the medium of how the tale could be told unconstrained.

5. *Reflection*

This is a chance for designers to reflect on their solutions to the brief both as a group and as individuals. Yet again, the stronger the links

between the expert group and the designers the better, as engagement with the expert group provides a different viewpoint of the design solutions from a user group.

6. Final prototypes
Final iterations of the design solutions and creation of prototypes. Demonstrations and evaluations of prototypes by both expert and designer groups (see chapter 14 for final project results).

12.3 Experiencing & Observing Storytelling

The Retelling module introduced, or in many cases 'reintroduced' (from childhood remembrances), traditional storytelling to students. Storytelling in Scotland however, suffers from the misconception that storytelling is just for children, and I was acutely aware of that assumption when starting work with the students.

Module Kick-Off: Storytelling in a Natural Environment

In the early planning stages of the module it was recognised that the students should be exposed to the captivating power of stories as soon as possible, in a bid to inspire them from the start and address negative connotations around the notion of storytelling appealing only to young children. The first scheduled full day of teaching therefore was rearranged into an afternoon and evening event instead. The afternoon consisted of introductory talks by myself and module leader. This interactive session included exploring online storytelling and examples of stories appearing across media boundaries (e.g. YouTube film spoofs and resurgence of Pablo Neruda). I introduced some of my research and work with storytellers whilst being careful not to impose my views of storytelling and its attributes. This was followed by a short storycard game, where students were split into four groups and given a set of seven cards.

Each group had the same set of cards (chicken, gun, shadow, apple, mirror, door and chair). They had fifteen minutes to construct a story around the cards before telling them to the rest of the class. In my naivety, I assumed that the students would discuss and create the stories by talking,

then simply tell the gist of them to the group. However, within 30 seconds or so of handing out the cards I heard simultaneous murmurs of, 'Has anyone got paper? I'll start writing down the story.' Without fail, each group wrote their story down and read it out to the others at the end. However, the quality of group work was good (probably largely due to their past experience of collaborative working and peer network) and the stories themselves were quite inventive. Having run similar a exercise with a different groups and students (Interior and Environmental Design), and explicitly instructing them not to write, the results were nowhere near as diverse.

The stories included genetically modified chickens which laid apples and sought revenge on their farmer creator; a chicken committing suicide to stop its mocking reflection (the mirror reflection laughed at the chicken because it didn't have a shadow); a gangster called Shadow who had a gunfight around chicken soup; and finally a less coherent story that involved a prize-winning cockerel, gunshot, and a vicar.

Storycards

After recounting their tales, the students were then told about the evening storytelling event. This was held in a nearby pub, and several local storytellers took part. It was important that the students were able to experience storytelling away from the academic environment and studio space and see it happening in a more authentic space.

From the pub to outer space and back again

Drouthy Neebors was ideally located just across the road from the art college and the tucked away and quiet downstairs bar was the perfect setting for the stories. The spiral staircase led down to the low-ceilinged bar, the glow of drinks cabinets providing the brightest and harshest source of light in the room. Round the corner past the small bar, the room turned into a narrow, long, space, populated with smart leather armchairs and low coffee tables. Near the bottom of the room the fireplace held not a glowing fire but rather a row of lit candles on the mantelpiece, their light flickeringly reflected by the gilt mirrors above. Candles also gleamed from every available shelf and alcove, giving a soft, warm feel to the otherwise dark room.

Drouthy's pub—the candles

As students and storytellers began to arrive, chairs were rearranged and hurried chats were held about how best to arrange the room. Once everyone was settled and a drink in their hand, Jess took to the floor. A diminutive woman, as soon as she spoke, she filled the room with her presence and we all fell silent. A true traveller, her style was colloquial, anecdotal and completely captivating. Jess led the night and began by explaining a little about her life living on a bus as a child and the culture of travellers in Scotland. Then she told an anecdote from when she was a girl at school having been asked to write a fantastic essay about a sea creature. Her mother gave her advice and told her about the octopus with eight testicles, which she duly wrote about, much to her later embarrassment at school. Of course, this got everyone laughing and melted any remaining bits of ice.

We broke midway to give the tellers a breather and to allow everyone to refresh their glasses and it was amazingly encouraging to watch students making a genuine effort to speak to the storytellers. The second section kicked-off with an anecdote from a storyteller from Blether Tay-gither, Robbie. She recounted a recent storytelling experience about toy spiders that had gone missing and the importance of being able to improvise and adapt stories.

Owen, another Blether Tay-gither regular, told a more traditional fairy tale about a changeling, however it was sufficiently dark and brooding enough to command the respect of the student listeners.

One of the best features of the evening was the diversity of stories and storytellers. For example, Lindsey created a fantastic spontaneous story with lots of audience participation and interaction. The plot was complex but revolved around a joke involving an Alsatian dog in outer space and a milkman (and was succinctly rounded off by a reference to the milky way in a pourquoi story style). To complete the ensemble, Paul sang a couple of songs with his guitar, and Jess also sang a few songs too, including an evocative ballad about a young girl finding herself pregnant out of wedlock.

The concluding story of the night was from Jess and it was the story of *Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots*. Unbeknown to anyone there at the time, that tale ended up being the story the students worked with for the duration of the module.

Throughout the evening, the students all appeared to enjoy the entertainment and were certainly a respectful audience. However, it was gratifying

to read a blog entry from one of the students following the session;

> I remember being told again and again by my grandad that the scottish people are losing our culture (as i suppose applies to lots of groups of people) However hearing Jess and the others tell stories and sing has shown me that at least somewhere our traditions are being held on to. I actually felt myself well up when she was signing. The way they were telling stories was so en-gaging and it seemed so natural to them it probably is.
>
> Posted at 2008-01-24 11:29

Similarly, in interviews conducted a few days after the final module assessment, several students commented on the enjoyment of the evening in the pub;

> *Callum*: I'd never really seen anything like that before. So I went to Drouthy's I was a bit sceptical, I wasn't sure what to expect - didn't know if I'd like it. But then, once we were there and then, like Owen and Jess and that were telling us stories and they were; you seen how much they were in—they were involved in telling the story, they were really, kind of, emotive, I suppose, is the word? They expressed themselves very well, yeah, and I witnessed that and it was really—it was, yeah, I enjoyed it. It was much—I was going to say better, but it was much more of a compelling experience I think than I expected it to be, I suppose. That was the first time I'd experienced anything like that, it was good.

> *Douglas*: Perceptions of storytelling was kind of, kids thing, you know? Storytelling was very much a Disney kind of childish, tell a story to go to bed, or watching Disney movies, and that's what I thought storytelling was. Kind of old tales like Snow White and Brothers Grimm and all that kind of stuff. That was my viewpoint on what storytelling was.
> *Me*: And so that first evening in Drouthy's then was that..?
> *Douglas*: That was really interesting. Kind of an eye-opener. That was when the project ideas started to actually flow. Actually in that kind of environment, seeing the kind of community stuff that goes with it,

and the way people told it was really intriguing. I loved it.

Sandra: I didn't know what to expect when we first went along to Drouthys, like I really didn't know what to expect but it was really good. It was good fun and it was all really friendly and you could feel like you could get involved quite easily, even though it was your first time there.

Eric: I didn't really have anything to base my expectations on so I didn't really know what to expect. I enjoyed the sort of like, the intimacy of the pub was like better cos you felt you were part of it, rather than just watching something. And also the environment being a bit more less formal was a bit more enjoyable as well.

Stage II – Understanding Storytelling

Listening to stories in a pub is one thing, but to gain a better sense of what storytelling is about, especially in the short time frame of a teaching semester, it was important that the students experienced storytelling from another perspective—that of the teller. Whilst the aim was never to create traditional storytellers out of the students, working with a more kinaesthetic learning approach seemed to be appropriate for exploring such an oral and performative art form. It was hoped that this would generate a deeper understanding and respect for storytelling and awareness of the culture and skill of the art.

Intro IMD workshop, Friday 25th January 2008

Yesterday was the first real day of the IMD module in terms of teaching. Owen and I ran a workshop designed to introduce folktales and live telling to the students by giving them a chance to tell a story themselves in both traditional and digital formats. When planning the day, I thought it would be important to include a digital storytelling aspect to allow students to compare and experience the two forms. Also, I felt it might revive their potentially flagging interest in traditional storytelling by using computers later on in the day, creating a digital story. On reflection however, though the first aim may

have been met, in that they were able to compare digital with oral, the only negative feedback of the day was pointed squarely at the digital aspect (see blog extracts below).

> My first Voice thread...dodgy Posted by Jack on 2008-02-05 11:07
> This is my first attempt at a voice thread and its not as easy as it sounds....
> Hello and welcome to my voice thread blog entry. Last week we were asked to learn a story and tell it to the rest of the group in the traditional story telling way. This was a nice chance to get comfortable reading stories to a group and a great opportunity to help boast my confidence at talking out loud (cause you all know how much i love doing it! NOT)
> Any whoooo we were then asked to record our story as a voice thread on this website... I kind of struggled with this, i couldn't seem to give the computer all my emotions and enthusiasm but if you wish to have a listen be my guest.
> > http://voicethread.com/[link]

> the workshop Posted by Karen on 2008-01-24 23:09
> i really liked making up the stories with the cards and reading the folk stories from around the world. I didnt really like the voicethread site tho as it seemed a bit of a strange way to make a story slide show. What can i say i guess I'll always prefer using flash for that type of presentation :)

> Owen's workshop Posted by Rob on 2008-01-31 15:13
> I thought the workshop was really good. It gave me a better understanding of storytelling by doing it for myself. Although im still finding it a bit difficult im sure ill have it down in the end.

Most of the students turned up (about eighteen) and we kicked off at ten o'clock. After outlining the day's plan I introduced Owen again (the students had met him at the storytelling evening in the pub a couple of days earlier) and then Owen told a Duncan Williamson story. It was a typical Jack tale, where Jack is the wise fool, tricking the authorities into giving him a chest of gold.

After this, the students were split into four groups and each group was given the same set of short printed stories. I deliberately chose stories from

a range of places to try and show a mix of cultures and story diversity. Each student took a story was asked to read it to themselves a few times before walking around the studio space, reading out aloud. At least, that was the plan. I had been involved in a similar exercise previously which worked well, the idea being that saying the words out loud not only helps to fix the story in your mind, but also relaxes you and gives a chance to hear and feel the story being spoken. However, the students were reluctant to do this. In part I think this was due to no one being willing to be the first to start walking and speaking out loud, but also the physical space of the studio was slightly constraining, due to fixed desks and the large amount of furniture which limited the free walking.

The students were then asked to think about their stories in terms of seven themes (revenge, love, quest and so on) and to discuss which one they thought their story might fit into, without directly disclosing their story to the rest of their group. The concept of seven themes worked well, giving a focus and purpose to their discussion. Individually, students were told to create a set of bare bones for their story (the essence of the plot in a bulleted list) and then use that to create a storymap. The storymap was a visual representation of the story as a single image, ideally showing the flow of the story. Some of the students got the idea and created maps like a journey, clearing demonstrating the story flow. Others created a single image, or a snapshot of a particular incident in the story, whilst others created a storyboard. One of the female students spent a considerable amount of time drawing a hawk from a reference image sourced on the internet, a clear example of the extent to which technology is at hand and permeates life. In retrospect, this section could have been more effective had there been better direction and guidance on what was expected of the students, through prepared examples. Also, a more effective space could have been used which would have minimised the distracting influences of computers and arrangement of room.

Yet despite this, when asked to tell their stories to each other in their groups, it was a positive experience. They were told not to use visual references (including written notes) and they all managed it successfully. They told stories, in their own ways, without pauses and without reading. I had asked them, as listeners, to comment positively on some specific aspect of each story they heard. I think this positive feedback was very important in building some self-confidence.

As is only to be expected, some students got into the storytelling more than others. One girl was practising the story in her head, her eyes shut and face screwed up in concentration. Her rendition of the Hawk and Chicken story was compelling, and she seemed to have a natural aptitude for telling. (I discovered later that she spent the summer at Camp America and told stories to children over there. During the course of the module she rekindled her love for stories.) Another girl in the same group voluntarily shared an additional story (not one of the ones I had handed out).

Other students were more nervous at speaking out, but they all told them well. The strong peer friendships were both a blessing and a curse; because everyone was comfortable speaking in front of friends, they had discussed the stories more than I expected, so that they all knew each other's stories before they officially told them in the groups. For example, one of the boys told the She-wolf story and changed the telling of it quite a bit. Normally, it would not be obvious (or at least, would be accepted) but another student in the group pointed out the sections he had missed.

The final section of the morning was spent using the storycards again, this time working individually before telling the stories to their group. This was of more mixed success than the previous group exercise, possibly because it was an individual exercise (although there was still some collaboration) and perhaps because the novelty factor had gone.

After lunch, I asked the students to reflect on what they thought about storytelling and the possibilities of connections between it and new media (Discussed in Chapter 13). Owen then set up and told a story soundscape which seemed to be quite inspirational for the students judging from conversations afterwards.

Finally, the last part of the workshop was the use of digital storytelling software VoiceThreads which allows annotations. I had thought that this would be the most successful element of the day, but the students' experience of new media applications made them appraise VoiceThreads critically. We rounded up the day's activities and Owen told a closing story.

All in all, combined with the evening storytelling session in Drouthy's, it was a good start for exploring storytelling.

Following that first workshop, another storyteller came into the studio the next week. She talked about her background as a teller and shared many

stories. At this point in the module the story for the main assessment (telling a traditional tale digitally) had not been set, so all these stories provided fodder for discussion. Students were asked to produce a written story during the day, in response to a selection of objects (e.g. church steeple, a worn hat, an old gnarled tree and a dragonfly).

The following week students were asked to prepare three short folktales (handed out randomly) and to produce a YouTube video of one of the them. The other two they were to prepare to tell to each other in groups again. This was another exercise to engage students with the mindset of storytelling.

> First thoughts posted by Sandra on 2008-01-30 17:25
> Onto week 3 of the module, my imagination is loving the storytelling!
> Really enjoying the module so far. Last week was so helpful in breaking us into the idea of storytelling and i have learnt so much from both workshops and from the session in Drouthy's. Here is a link to my voice thread that I made on thursday.
> http://voicethread.com/?[link] I am currently using some of the techniques that we have been taught to learn my stories such as the image map. Will post my video on the story of The wooden stick in the next few days.

Another experience of a different kind of storytelling happened about halfway through the module, when a guest lecturer ran a gaming workshop using Neverwinter Nights PC gaming environment demonstrated how they used this as a storytelling tool with children, using branching narratives and conditional logic. There was a mixed success to this day, students seemed to get caught up on the software and technicalities, all thoughts of story were lost. Granted it was only a very short time to produce something, but interest levels flagged quite quickly.

12.4 Idea Generation & Prototyping

The story for the Re-Telling assessment was decided on as *Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots* (for story synopsis see the captions in the list of illustrations in table of contents). This was chosen as the story because of its structure (could be easily simplified or elaborated) and its content (could

be told as either light humour or dark horror). Students were encouraged to find alternative story versions, and to adapt the folktale to suit their needs, perhaps setting it in a different location or time.

In week five students were asked to present conceptual ideas for their individual projects as a peer review process. It was evident even at this early stage that the range of projects would be varied. One student who expressed concern with the story (he didn't like it!) told me he wanted to focus on the medium of storytelling rather than the narrative, specifically the presence of the teller, 'trying to bring back the storyteller' (Student quote). As the results will attest, several students went down this route, concentrating on the experiential nature of telling as opposed to the narrative construct.

Following the first critical review, students refined their ideas and began prototyping. In week eight a storyteller from Blether Tay-gither came into the studio to provide individual feedback on ideas and to act as a sounding board. This was useful and gave the students the opportunity to practise some user centred design concepts.

A final pre-assessment crit took place in week 10 before the assessment and mini-festival in week 13. The festival element allowed students to see their projects as used in a real environment by storytellers (e.g. the Digital Campfire described in chapter 14).

Chapter 13
Student Thoughts on Storytelling

The Interactive Media Design students initially experienced storytelling in an informal, out of 'school' atmosphere in the first week of term, and additionally heard several stories in the studio from two tellers who came to talk to them and run workshops. Students had a chance to speak to the storytellers and also tried hands-on, learning about the process of preparing and telling a story themselves. At this point, I felt it would be useful to capture their early thoughts on storytelling and the possible avenues for connecting new media and storytelling. This would be beneficial to the students as a brainstorming exercise, kick starting their ideas for the main ReTelling project (i.e. retell Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots using digital technology), and would be useful to me to compare my observations on storytelling, whilst also giving an indication of student engagement with the project: did they think that storytelling was simply for children? How open minded/positive were they about the overall module?

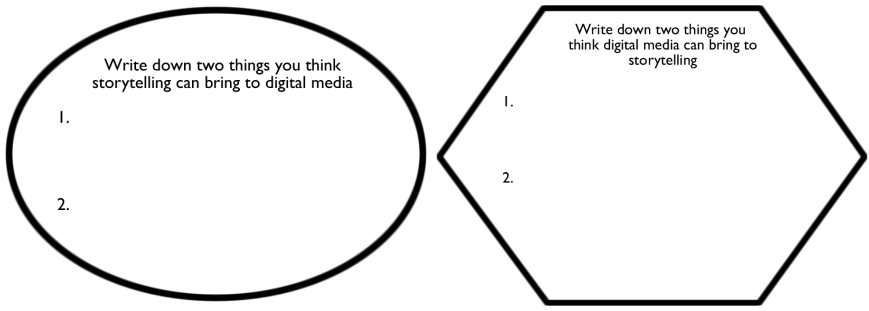
13.1 Reflection Session

The short reflection session (which took about an hour) was part of a day long workshop with a storyteller. Each student was asked to respond to three prompts on small pieces of paper:

1. What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?
2. Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to dig-

ital media
3. Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling

The pre-cut questions were deliberately designed to be small, forcing students to be succinct in their answers and ensuring that the answers requested were not too daunting. The exercise was planned to elicit short, almost reflexive, responses; reflection would occur on ranking the raft of answers.

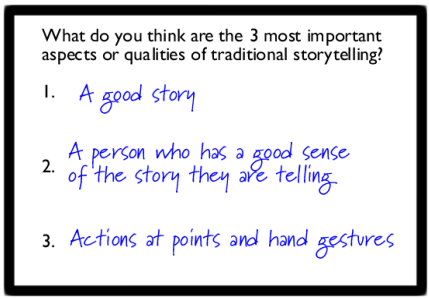


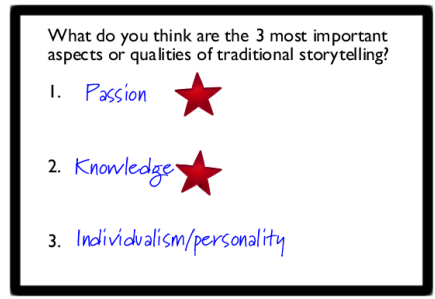
Prompts (as handed out to students in three shapes)

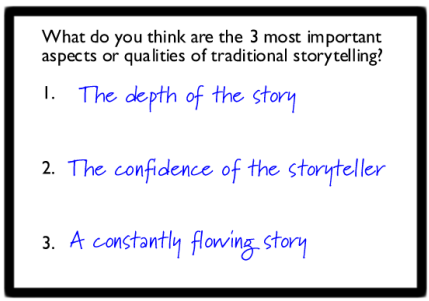
After ten minutes or so, once some people had completed their questions, I pinned up three large sheets of paper on the wall (one for each prompt) and asked those who had finished to stick their answers onto the paper. Eventually each answer was pinned on the wall, and everyone was given three stickers (one for each prompt) to mark the answers they felt were most appropriate (i.e. group ranking of answers). The results are presented and discussed in the following pages.

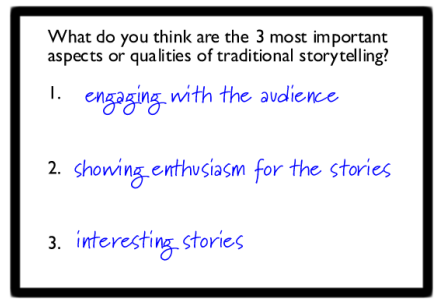
13.2 Prompt 1: Qualities of Traditional Storytelling

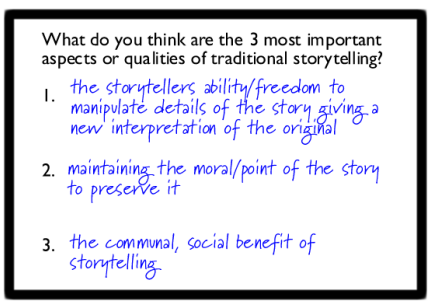
The answers to question one (*What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?*) along with their rankings, or stars, are shown below.

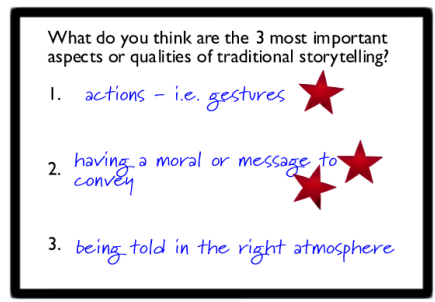












What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. teaching life lessons and morals like the boy who cried wolf – don't lie
2. remembering what life used to be like. Traditional ways of living
3. knowing where you've come from, why you do things, where the traditions comes from.

What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. the ability to use you voice to enhance the story
2. eye contact
3. give good imagery

What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. connecting with people face to face
2. reusable nature of the medium
3. social gathering/event

What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. the storyteller his/herself -> the prescence they bring
2. the words used, especially old scots ones.
3. The atmosphere – relationship between the storyteller & audience

What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. making audience feel part of story
2. telling it as if telling it 1 to 1 even when in a group
3. making the story come alive

What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

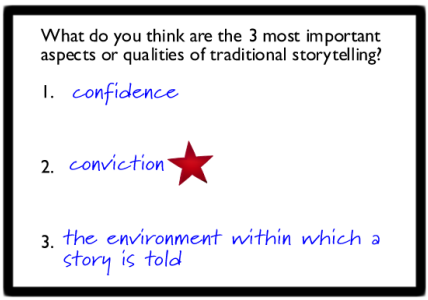
1. presence
2. personality
3. comfort

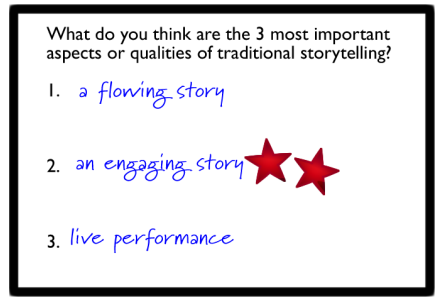
What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. communicating information
2. body language – as a way of passing on information
3. an audience to look at who communicate back

What do you think are the 3 most important aspects or qualities of traditional storytelling?

1. personal involvement
2. audience/listening
3. natural/primal links





Looking at these responses, the most popular (highest ranked) are:

- Social gathering/event (4 stars)
- An engaging story (2 stars)
- Having a moral/message to convey (2 stars)
- Passion/conviction (1 star each)
- Knowledge (1 star)
- Personal involvement (1 star)
- Actions, i.e. gestures (1 star)
- Traditions—knowing where you've come from (1 star)
- Making the story come alive (1 star)

Apart from the most popular 'social gathering/event' answer, there is no clear hierarchy. If we map the students' answers and consider them all (regardless of ranking), there are several similarities or recurrent themes which emerge (some of which relate to the ranked states). These themes are:

- the importance of the story itself,
- morals in stories,
- tradition bearers,
- belief in stories
- toolset of tellers
- performance
- social gathering & environment
- personal, emotive aspect

Let us examine each of these themes in turn.

The Importance of the Story itself

Time and again, the answers link to necessary qualities of stories, 'a good story', 'an engaging story', 'a constantly flowing story'. On the face of it this seems simple enough, without high quality stories a storyteller would struggle. But how much of this is due to the story and how much due to the teller? Perhaps a more precise answer can be found in the notion that the importance lies in 'a person who has a good sense of the story they are telling'. Whilst this is conjecture, this 'sense' could relate not only to being able to memorise the plot of a story, but a more thorough background understanding of the story. That is, being able to relate and contextualise it effectively so that it can be told convincingly and *authentically* (storytelling characteristic no. 11, chapter 9). If this is the case then it follows that the intrinsic 'quality' of stories varies depend-ing on the teller's own judgement of its quality. So, a 'good' story to one teller may be a poor tale for another.

This is obviously linked to another suggested answer 'passion/conviction'. The students have picked up on the genuine love of stories by the tellers, their *intentional desire to share stories* (storytelling characteristic no. 10, chapter 9).

Morals in stories

That this answer occurs is somewhat surprising. At no point did I, nor any of the tellers, mention this, nor were any of the stories deliberately moralising (indeed it is hard to see any moral at all in some of the tales that were told). It would appear that this is a throwback to childhood stories with emphasised morals which Zipes discusses (1997) have influenced the popularity of this answer. This ties in with the established cultural perception that storytelling is for children, which is further emphasised by post-module interviews, for example;

> My perceptions of storytelling was very much a Disney kind of childish tell a story to go to bed or watching Disney movies and that's what I thought storytelling was. Kind of old tales like Snow White and Brothers Grimm and all that kind of stuff. That was my viewpoint on what storytelling was. Douglas (interview)

> Debbie: So, before the module started, the opening evening in Drouthy's—how much were you aware of storytelling or what was your experience of storytelling been before that?
> Gregor: I think it had always been sort of as a child, growing up being told stories. 'Cos my mum used to tell me stories in bed and stuff and it always seemed to be a childhood thing but think that probably progressed with the module. Definitely into sort of, adults [unheard] sort of a family thing and anyone can listen to stories or tell stories but it was definitely—I thought it was aimed towards children before and that was it. Just to sort of teach them morals and stuff.

Needless to say, storytelling is an excellent vehicle for conveying moralistic messages in subtle and understandable ways (see chapter 5) yet this was never an intent for the module.

Tradition Bearers

Storytelling is an ancient art, tellers are acutely aware of the cultural import of their work. However, from the student answers they infer tradition and culture to be traditional Scottish culture, undoubtedly due in large part to Jess' anecdotes on her life as a Scottish traveller. More than just cultural preservation, there is a hint of identity connected to this theme, 'knowing where you come from, why you do things, where the traditions comes from'.

There was another, more problematic given student answer of 'knowledge'. This may be a comment on the skill of the teller (e.g. knowledge of how to perform or read the reactions of an audience), or deeper knowledge of the cultural heritage. Or it may even relate to the traditional role of storytellers as custodial, knowledgeable beings of elevated social standing in the community, able to put their stories to good use. This interpretation links with the previous theme of moralistic stories.

Belief in Stories

This theme is closely linked to the *Importance of the Story* theme described above. Belief in the story is shown by 'the confidence of the storyteller' and

through 'showing enthusiasm for the stories'. This confidence, 'conviction' and skill is instrumental in 'making the story come alive', and it is clearly driven by a passion for the stories and the art. The diversity of the storytellers was noted by the students too, through their 'personality' and 'individualism/personality'. Once more this connects closely with the *authenticity of the teller* and *intentional desire to share stories* along with *diversity of storytelling styles* noted in the set of storytelling characteristics developed in chapter 9.

Toolset of Tellers

The importance of language, and specifically voice, was not lost on the students. Several responses cited the power of language to 'give good imagery' and the 'ability to use you(r) voice to enhance the story'. Similarly the words using in the telling are important, 'the words used, especially old Scots ones.' Local dialect is not only an aspect of personal and cultural identity but also of context—telling a story in Scots situates it in a Scottish setting.

More than the purely oral aspect of storytelling however is the physical presence of the storyteller, using body language and actions to tell the tale. Again, several students picked up on this, 'body language – as a way of passing on information', 'actions – i.e. gestures', and 'actions at points and hand gestures'.

The student responses correlate with several of the storytelling characteristics defined earlier, particularly *voice*, *gesture* and *physical presence*.

Performance

A lot of the answers from the students touched on the live nature of storytelling, including the malleability and reusability of stories ('the storytellers ability/freedom to manipulate details of the story giving a new interpretation of the original', and 'the reusable nature of the medium'). This is connected to the physical presence of the audience, another aspect apparent from the answers, 'connecting with people face to face' and the ability to 'engage with the audience'. In this powerful communication mech-

anism, 'eye contact' is vital for interaction (that is, 'an audience to look at who communicate back').

Social gathering & Environment

It is obvious the initial night in Drouthy's pub gave all the students the impression that storytelling is primarily a social gathering or event. No doubt had they only experienced storytelling in the confines of an academic environment this answer would not be nearly as popular, if even there at all. Storytelling is all about communication, human communication, whether this be in entertainment, instruction or guidance, and so there is always some element of social gathering present.

It is interesting and pleasing that the social aspect was the highest ranked answer and suggests that the students genuinely enjoyed the experience. Other answers reinforce this idea, through references to atmosphere and environment; 'the atmosphere – relationship between the storyteller & audience', 'being told in the right atmosphere', and 'the environment within which a story is told'.

Personal Aspect

Storytelling is to me a relatively unique phenomenon—whilst being an active group experience, with interactions and occasional interjections from listeners (e.g. gasps of horror, laughter) and an audience responsive storyteller, it is also an intensely personal experience. In the same way in which a film or book is open to individual interpretation, so too is a story. The mental images are provided by the listener, aided or prompted by the teller, and the effect of each story is largely dependent on personal preference and mood at the time being told. This aspect of storytelling was present in the students' answers, 'telling it as if telling it 1 to 1 even when in a group', and 'making audience feel part of story'. A more ambiguous answer was 'personal involvement'. Without further description it is hard to know the exact meaning of this, but it could relate to the personal involvement of the teller or the emotional response from the listener.

Reflections

The student responses in general did not deviate far from the characteristics derived in chapter 9 and reproduced below.

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles
2. Collective memory
3. Performance
4. Liveness
5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination
9. Connection between story, teller and listener (co-creation)
10. Intentional desire by teller and group to share stories
11. Authenticity of the teller

Issues which students mentioned but are not contained in the above list were 'social event' and 'morals'. The social aspect of storytelling is very important (and was included in the *Lens for Reflection tool* developed in the Bridge section). It is worth noting that *social* does not feature in the list from chapter 9 and was not suggested as a characteristic by any of the tellers who commented on the list, nor was it an attribute I thought was missing. Storytelling is an inherent social activity, I would argue that Scottish storytelling is *always* social. It is so embedded and intertwined that it is a part of storytelling, and therefore escaped notice as an individual attribute. If we consider the definition of storytelling (chapter 9) as a medium, as a culture, inseparable from the context in which it is situated, then social is already encompassed in our definition.

The other main point students noted were the use of morals and teaching, as has been discussed this is not necessarily the case and is undoubtedly a throw back to Disney and Grimm tales.

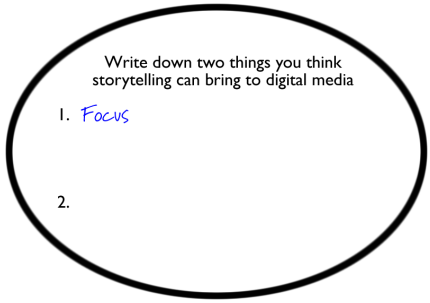
Characteristics not mentioned by the students were *collective memory*, although identity and tradition were suggested, as a way to strengthen and share a sense of where you come from and who you are. Visual imagination and co-creativity were not explicitly mentioned either, however they were alluded to (e.g. 'making the story come alive' and 'the storytellers ability/freedom to manipulate details of the story giving a new interpretation

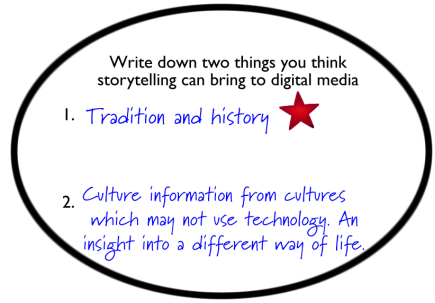
of the original').

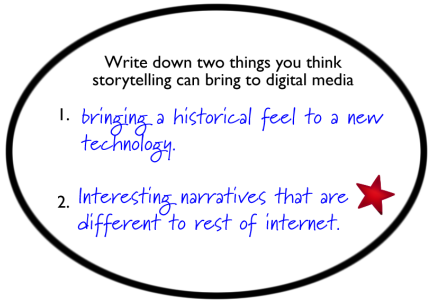
In summary then, the students picked up on the latent points of storytelling very well, especially considering the relatively short amount of time they had observed tellers.

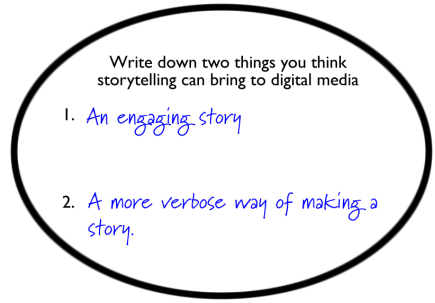
13.3 Prompt 2: What can Storytelling bring to Digital Media?

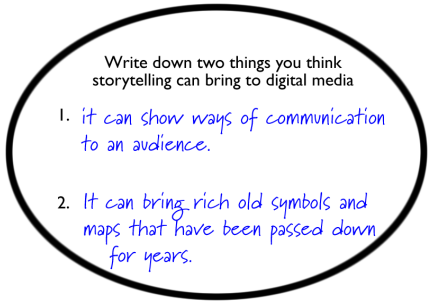
The answers to prompt number two (*Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media*) are shown below.

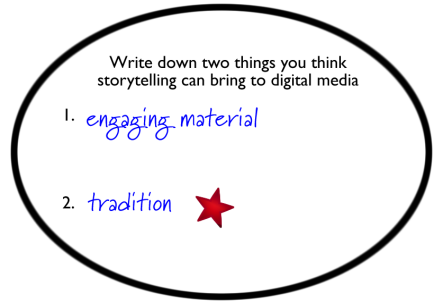

Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. Focus
2.

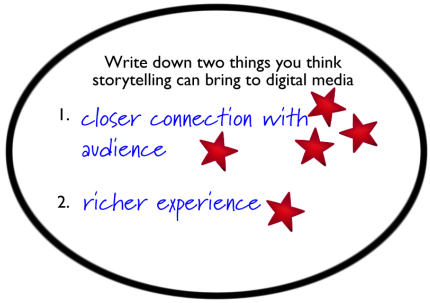

Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. Tradition and history
2. Culture information from cultures which may not use technology. An insight into a different way of life.

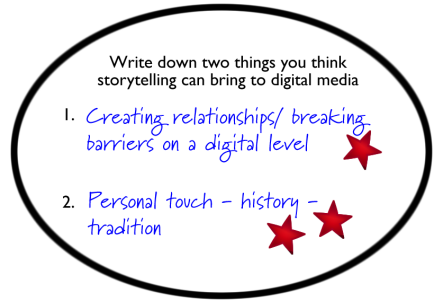

Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. bringing a historical feel to a new technology.
2. Interesting narratives that are different to rest of internet.

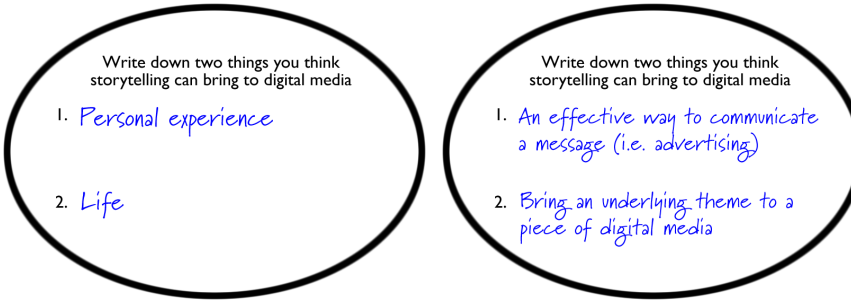

Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. An engaging story
2. A more verbose way of making a story.


Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. it can show ways of communication to an audience.
2. It can bring rich old symbols and maps that have been passed down for years.


Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. engaging material
2. tradition


Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. closer connection with audience
2. richer experience


Write down two things you think storytelling can bring to digital media
1. Creating relationships/ breaking barriers on a digital level
2. Personal touch – history – tradition



Looking at these responses, the most popular (highest ranked) are:

- Tradition and history (6 stars, made up from four very similar answers)
- Closer connection with audience (4 stars)
- More meaningful experience, a more meaningful purpose (2 stars)
- Richer content & experience (2 stars, one from 'richer experience' and one from 'richer con-tent')
- Interesting narratives that are different to rest of internet (1 star)
- Creating relationships/breaking barriers on a digital level (1 star)

Once more, upon closer inspection the raft of answers can be considered to form a set of interleaved topics which is worthy of consideration. These are;

- Tradition and culture
- Purpose and meaning
- Narratives, and
- Effective communication & audience engagement

Tradition, *history* and *culture* form the most commonly mentioned answers from the students as to what storytelling can bring to digital media. This could potentially be interpreted in a somewhat negative light, in that traditional storytelling is only valid as an archaic mechanism, suitable for cultural preservation only. However, some of the offered answers hint at a means of fusing old and new, through carrying 'rich old symbols and maps that have been passed down for years', and 'bringing a historical feel to a new technology'.

This positive reading of the answers is borne out in another key theme, *Purpose and Meaning*. Many of the answers refer to the possibility of storytelling giving a focus and direction to digital media, giving 'the media reason and a purpose'.

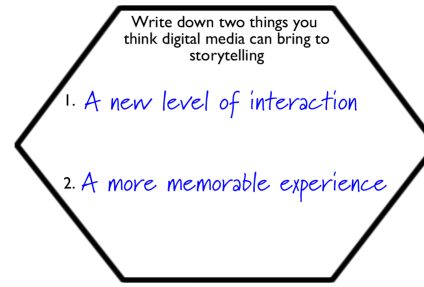
A means of combining tradition and meaning could be directly integrated through digitising 'cultur[al] information from cultures which may not use technology [giving] an insight into a different way of life.' This taps into digital preservation.

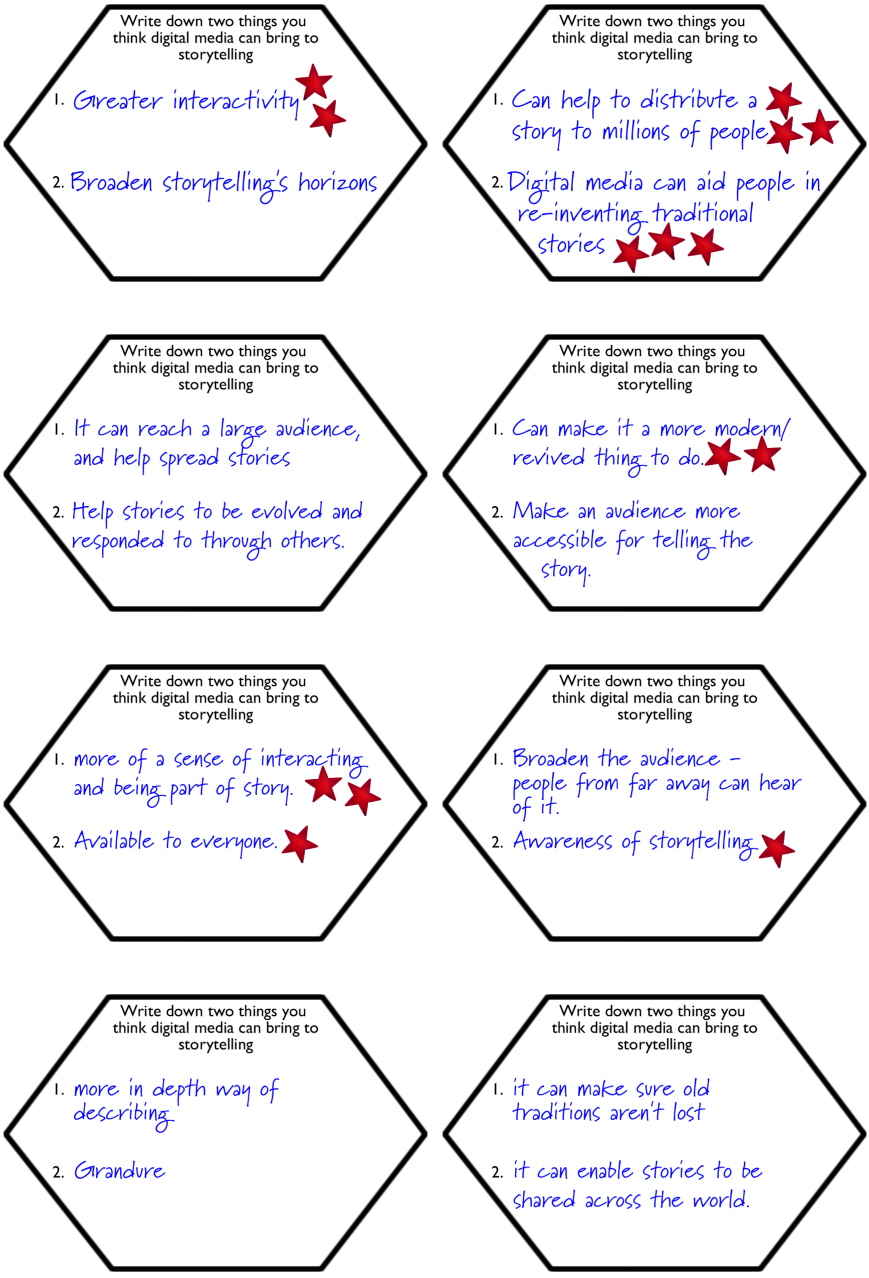
Yet an important theme is one of *audience engagement* where a 'richer experience' and a 'closer connection with [the] audience' could be adopted in digital media through working with storytelling. Through the combination of better awareness of the audience and increased meaning, a 'more meaningful experience, [and] a more meaningful purpose' can be achieved.

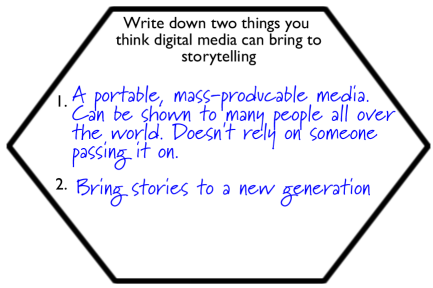
Perhaps surprisingly, the reference to stories themselves, whilst mentioned, do not feature highly in the students responses. It appears that traditions and cultural impact along with the overall experience are deemed more important, or at least leave a more lasting impression than the actual *narratives* themselves. One student noted that a story can be the catalyst for projects (in a parallel to the main module assignment), 'a good story can be the material that the digital artist needs to be inspired'. Another answer referred to the transient nature of stories, and suggested applying this to a digital context, to 'make a project different each time you tell the story of it.' This would imply that students were already picking up on the aspects of storytelling which differ in key ways from other means of presenting narrative (e.g. the printed word and films).

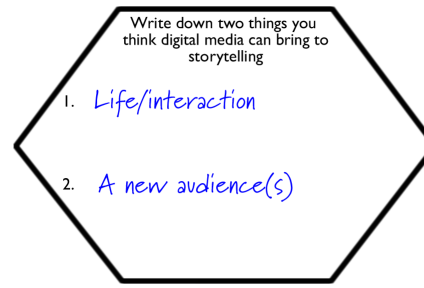
13.4 Prompt 3: What can Digital Media bring to Storytelling?

The responses to prompt number three, (*Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling*) are shown below.




Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. Greater interactivity
2. Broaden storytelling's horizons
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. Can help to distribute a story to millions of people
2. Digital media can aid people in re-inventing traditional stories
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. It can reach a large audience, and help spread stories
2. Help stories to be evolved and responded to through others.
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. Can make it a more modern/ revived thing to do.
2. Make an audience more accessible for telling the story.
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. more of a sense of interacting and being part of story.
2. Available to everyone.
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. Broaden the audience – people from far away can hear of it.
2. Awareness of storytelling
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. more in depth way of describing
2. Grandure
Write down two things you think digital media can bring to storytelling
1. it can make sure old traditions aren't lost
2. it can enable stories to be shared across the world.





Looking at these responses, the most popular (highest ranked) are:

- Greater interactivity (4 stars, 2 from 'greater interactivity' and 2 from 'more of a sense of interacting and being part of story')
- Can help to distribute a story to millions of people (4 stars, 1 in 'available to everyone')
- Digital media can aid people in re-inventing traditional stories (3 stars)
- Can make it a more modern/revived thing to do (2 stars)
- An easier to remember experience (1 star)

- New depth to audio (1 star)
- Awareness of storytelling (1 star)

By considering the student suggestions to what digital media could bring to storytelling and collating and grouping their answers [image] a few topics emerge, namely;

- the Modernisation of Tradition,
- the power of Mass Distribution & increased Accessibility,
- utilising a Digital toolset (interactivity, audio and visual),
- and, creating a more Memorable Experience

The Modernisation of Tradition

Many of the students' suggestions concerned the revitalisation and reinvention of tradition. The evolution of stories is mentioned more than once, 'help stories to be evolved and responded to through others', and, 'digital media can aid people in reinventing traditional stories'. This is nothing new to the world of storytelling and oral culture, indeed it is a key characteristic—tales mutate over time.

Connected to the digital story evolution proposed is the preservation of stories and tradition. The conservation of oral culture is not an unknown concept, yet it is interesting to note that there was only one direct reference to this ('it can make sure old traditions aren't lost'). Another reference to the closed nature of storytelling was in one answer 'broaden storytelling's horizons'. This suggests an archaic, cliquey aspect of storytelling, that is borne up by a post-module interview,

> Debbie: Do you think traditional storytelling's got a place in modern society, or is it a relic of the past?
> Richard: Erm, yeah I think it is useful. I mean obviously in terms of traditional storytelling, the way's it's done, erm, say having performances and people there, it's more of a kind of cliquey thing I think. That it's—that's the way it comes across, is you would go to the place and do this but if it's kind of more, like broadly out there in society, if it was more, people just did it as any everyday thing, they would be quite happy to tell people stories and things like that but kinda more

> elaborate stories than just like what they had for dinner the night before and things like that. But I think it is kinda seen as something that's apart, and sort of different. And whether you want to be a part of that or not is kinda, the question.

The main impression from the set of answers is the ability to generate new audiences whilst still 'encouraging people to read or here [hear] these traditional stories'. This is connected with a finding from the previous question described earlier, an outcome of 'what storytelling could bring to digital media' was that storytelling may bring a sense of purpose to digital media. Through generating new audiences and combining tradition and technology in a purposeful manner, technology would become reappropriated, a direct example of secondary orality (see Bridge *Connections between New Media & Storytelling*).

Distribution & Accessibility

The ability to generate new audiences for storytelling via digital media is possible through the Internet, with the power to '…distribute a story to millions of people' and transcend geographic boundaries to '…enable stories to be shared across the world'. Whilst this apparent 'utopia' is not necessarily a true vision of the future, it was also not completely subscribed to by the students. In a post-module interview, one of the students talked down the draw of technology;

> Patrick: I think for me certainly it made me realise, you know, that storytelling is something that was as valuable a thousand years ago as it is, you know, today. I mean people's attention may be now, you know, tipped to other places but it's, you know, as far as media goes it is still pretty powerful, you know, and if you're, like, if you're in a room and someone starts telling a story you don't step up and go 'excuse me' and away out you go, you know, in the middle of a story but if someone's changes the channel to something they're watching you can certainly get yourself up and leave. So, you know, people will be like, 'Oh television's the most powerful media because it can get through to, you

know, a billion people,' but ah, if it can't get through to all the people in the room is it really that effective? You know.
Debbie: Mmm, fraction of the-
Patrick: You know if, it could be three billion people sitting in their front rooms but two billion of them don't care less, it's only one of three whereas a storyteller can get, you know, well three out of three in the room. So, yeah, people get, I think, you know, they get a bit too in love with, you know, technology and think it's the be all and end all of the 21st century.

On the flip side of the coin, another student in a similar interview felt that traditional storytelling would disappear in favour of the perceived safety of online environments;

Debbie: Do you think that traditional storytelling's got a place in modern society?
Eric: Honestly, I don't really like think so. I think storytelling has a place like obviously but erm, I don't see like traditional storytelling being something that the masses nowadays would be sort of like involved with, honestly. I'm not saying that's a good thing but it's just I don't think it would be something that would be a mass thing nowadays.
Debbie: Why do you think that is?
Eric: Er, I just think people are, sort of like, nowadays people are erm, less willing to sort of like get together in that sort of communal environment, and when they are in that communal environment now they've got the kind of—the communal environment that exists online now with forums and second life and—people have this kind of like shield of their [computer] monitor that separates them from the rest of the community, so even though they're participating in a group activity erm, there's still that kind of like safeguard in front of them, the kind of like safety. And I think, given the choice between going in face to face with real people and going with the group of people but being on-line and not being face to face I think people would pick online really. Just because it feels safer.

> Debbie: Do you think it's more engaging then, the online version?
> Eric: Erm, not necessarily more engaging, erm, like I think erm, the, nothing just now beats like real life. and nothing would beat, nothing can duplicate the atmosphere that you would get in a pub environment listening to traditional storytellers but erm, I think er, people would still choose online...

The above extract is interesting as it presents the alternative side normally portrayed by the media, where online communities are often said to be dangerous (Kleinman, 2010, Midgley and Harkin, 2009). Eric reverses this, claiming that interactions with 'real' people are more exposed.

Publishing content online is generally speaking an enabling step, making stories 'available to everyone' and 'make an audience more accessible for telling the story'. Accessibility in this context refers to increasing the potential number of viewers, yet accessibility in web terminology is associated with, generally, the lack of accessibility of the Internet for groups of users (e.g. the visually impaired). In many ways, traditional storytelling is more accessible than any online forms.

The Digital Toolset

The first prompt provoked a theme of a storytelling 'toolset'. This final prompt provides a corresponding 'digital toolset.' Audio is cited by students as an enhancement technology can provide ('a soundtrack', and bringing 'new depth to audio'), visuals could augment the telling experience ('illustration', 'good visuals' and 'clear understandable relatable images'), and co-creativity aided through interactivity ('a new level of interaction', 'greater interactivity'). Interactivity, it is claimed, will generate 'more of a sense of interacting and being part of a story'. This seemingly contradicts the second prompt, which found that storytelling will bring about a 'closer connection with audience'. Are the two concepts mutually incompatible or are they reaching for the same goal? Live storytelling brings a sense of interaction, similarly, interactivity and audience engagement are common aims of digital media.

Memorable experience

One of the ranked responses to what digital media can bring to storytelling was 'an easier to remember experience.' Digital objects by their nature are easily replicable, and mutable (see Bridge *Characteristics of New Media*) and so it is quite possible that a digital or new media story could be replayed, or reread, and so thus remembered. Alternatively the externalisation of memory into digital formats negates some of the cumbersome memorisation previously required, so perhaps the reverse is true—stories do not need to be remembered because they are always available? A third interpretation is that the shape of new media stories may make them intrinsically more memorable. Taken out of context, it is difficult to say with conviction the meaning of this response, yet I would personally consider the stories told at a live storytelling event to be far more memorable than any I have seen or heard online.

13.5 Conclusions

The responses from the students in this short exercise highlight how quickly they identified key components in storytelling. Their suggested applications, or zones of overlap between new media and storytelling, are viable and not unexpected, drawing on interaction, and widespread sharing across networks.

The wording of prompts varies slightly from that used in the bulk of the thesis. 'Storytelling' is extended to 'traditional storytelling' (as discussed several times, storytelling today is an overused word denoting film, literature and advertising, 'traditional' narrowed down the connotations), and 'new media' is called 'digital media' (to widen the scope in this case, as the students were very conscious of the limitations and possibilities of digital technology).

It is important to note that whilst the responses in the main serve to further con-firm the thoughts on new media and storytelling presented in this thesis, the exercise described in this chapter was a fleeting, 'quick and dirty' research method. The student answers are completely anonymised (even to

the researcher), therefore the con-text and intentions behind them is unknown which leads to more questions than answers in some instances. In terms of provoking discussion and raising issues, the exercise was a success, both for researcher and students. If it was to be repeated, I would recommend the exercise to be run the exercise in three distinct sections, with ranking and reflection done after each prompt. This way the discussion and thoughts from initial prompts would feed into subsequent prompts.

Chapter 14
Timeless Tales: Results

Stories are not copied, they are reborn
Dan Yashinsky

Timeless Tales, a mini-exhibition, was the culmination of the Re-Telling module (i.e. case study for Part III). This chapter presents the results of the students' final projects, describing through words and imagery the concepts of each one. The results are framed in the context of the *Lens for Reflection* spectrum developed in the Bridge section. It should be noted that the projects are assessed in this spectrum by their conceptual promise, not their actual manifestation. In addition, the use of the spectrum and all comments had and have no bearing on the marks students received for their work.

14.1 Use of the Lens for Reflection

Out of the twenty-three students who took the module, twenty-one completed it and submitted final assessments. The twenty-one projects can be somewhat crudely considered to have focussed on either the story itself (perhaps in rewriting it, for example setting the tale in a modern context, creating story paths, or creating additional background stories) or storytelling culture (e.g. picking up on an attribute of storytelling such as gesture or emotion). The storytelling culture projects can then be subdivided into hybrid-performance pieces or attribute focussed. Summaries of the projects and their categories are shown overleaf.

Story-focussed (mainly presented through conventional screen-based media)

- Interactive gameshow
- Concept video for interactive stories on ipods
- Four short films (one of which was designed as a film trailer)
- An animation
- A short machinima
- Interactive educational device designed for use in schools with read-aloud script and on-screen still images
- A purely audio soundscape
- An advertising phone booth (purely audio)

(11 examples)

Storytelling Attribute focussed (often through physical media as an installation)

- Points of view/empathy through story (in the form of physical, tactile puppets)
- Emotional storytelling (research project investigating memory and emotion in story)
- Physical presence of storyteller
- An audio-photographic installation
- Website inviting musicians to respond to the story by creating music inspired by it
- Collective memory animation where users are shown one section of the story and must retell it to others and so work out the entire story through traditional telling.

(6 examples)

Storytelling Performance Aid

- Digital shadow hybrid with traditional teller
- An environmental aid in the form of a digital campfire
- Interactive image augmentation aid (drawing on uniqueness of each tale rendition)

(3 examples)

Other

- Graphic digital tapestry animation

(1 example)

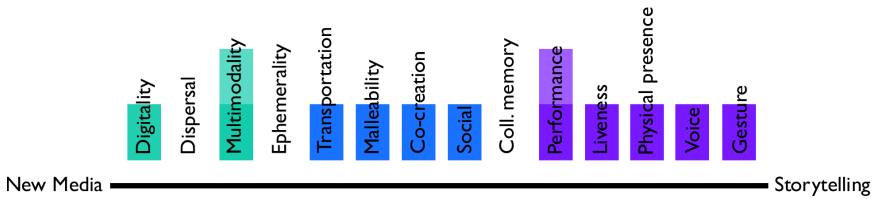
The detailing of the results which follows considers the projects in the *Lens for Reflection*; which is tiered into three main sections, new media, hybrid qualities, and story-telling. A brief description of each project is given, followed by relevant student comments (some of which document the student's progress through the module) and a short note on the key characteristics present in the project.

To determine which characteristics on the spectrum were present and the degree of them, the set of questions defined in Bridge: *Developing a Lens for Reflection* were asked. Nevertheless, even with this aid, it must be recognised that when representing a continuum, especially of largely subjective qualities, some debate may occur over the presence and degree of attributes. Any ensuing debate however, is beneficial, sparking discussion on the storytelling nature of the new media object under scrutiny, which is the key aim of the reflection tool, i.e. *reflection*.

14.2 Results

Storyteller

A interactive game show in the style of 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'



A television sits in the corner, on a square of pink patterned carpet. An old fashioned lamp is perched on top of a small ornament stand, adorned with wood-framed photo-graphs. Positioned in front of the television is a worn armchair.

This interactive game attempts to replicate a 1980's experience of TV game shows, with an interactive element. The story has been rewritten to incorporate branching narrative.

Screen grabs showing a question (left) and the TV control (right)

Student Comments:

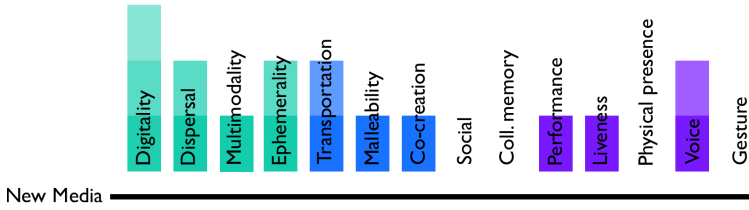
> 'I wanted to create a game that the storyteller would play with the audience, but then, due to whatever reasons, it became based on the computer with one person playing it. Then I thought, that's really boring just having someone clicking a mouse on that. So I decided to make a game show on the TV, which you then interact with, with remote control. It was just a different way to—like an interactive narrative I suppose, in the sense that you had options to make, which dictated where the story unfolded and finished. But then I just put a spin on it with like, how it was the game show that you can win a prize sort of thing—but there wasn't a prize.'
>
> He smiles. The 'prize' was, of course, a pair of boots and a cow.
>
> 'I modelled it on all the remakes of old game shows and I thought if I'm going to make an experience installation type thing, and I thought it's easier to make it old where you can cheap stuff from the recycling centre than it is to make it new. But it was just to give someone a different way to—just to give the person who's listening to or being told the story a different way—giving them a way to interact with the storyteller as they tell the story…I'd taken a version and made my own version of the story and split it, and made up, like little asides and little added bits to it so you could have three possible endings as you played the game and there were nine different routes you could run through the story.'

Characteristics

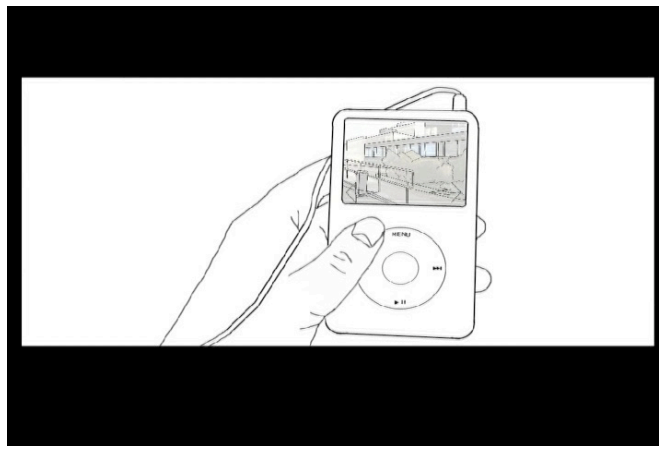
This project clearly demonstrated multimodality in audio, visual and touch through the remote controller. It provided an element of malleability, co-creativity and social via the sense of environment created by the lamp, chair, carpet etc. You could imagine a family sitting round conferring with each other on the choices. Similarly liveness is encapsulated in the social gathering. It sought an aspect of *transportation*, placing the viewer in the role of game show contestant, as well as physically situating the viewer in a 1980s living room yet this was only partially realised.

iTales

A concept video to promote iTales – an interactive, mobile story-telling experience for use on iPods.



iTales was presented as a brand, a way of discovering stories on an iPod and accessed from Apple's iTunes. The stories were designed to be subtly interactive, enough to make small changes to the plot without substantially altering it. The student spent a great deal of time early on in the module working on a contemporary version of the plot and characters, before arriving at the concept video. Consideration was given to the melding of tradition and technology, by using an iPod, younger generations could hear traditional stories.



Going back to my roots posted on 2008-04-14 11:27

I have spent the last week at home[…]I've been in debate with myself over the past few weeks over what the key aspect of my project and work is. Was it the story itself? I loved developing my characters. Getting to know who they were, how they would act and how they grew up. I loved trying to bring the old story into modern times. Looking at the BBC, looking at re-makes of old movies etc.

Was it the technical aspect? I enjoyed getting my flash to work, although I did find it frustrating at times. The sense of achievement of doing something new was great yet there was more to it than that.

Finally last Thursday I went to my friend's house. The two youngest children are five and eight years old. The eight year old has recently discovered the Beano and took great pleasure in showing me her collection and telling me her favourite stories. The five year old was watching a show on television and so deeply immersed I made her jump when I said her name. That night when I went up to tuck them into bed I read them a story, it was one of the "My Naughty Little Sister" series if I remember correctly. Sitting there reading out loud, watching their faces as they laughed and gasped with the twists and turns, and the eight year olds announcement that her little sister was just as annoying as the little sister in the book, helped me get right back into the core of storytelling.

This is what storytelling is, in my opinion anyway. Becoming engaged in the story. Laughing with the characters, feeling like you are right there with them. And this, I feel is what the key essence of my project was, not the story itself, not the technology, the whole concept of bringing the story to life for the person hearing, or seeing it.

…I feel really on track now. I know that I want to do a concept video for sure. I want to portray how engaging I feel storytelling could be in the digital age we are now in. We learn through stories, we always have, It's trying to capture that moment when you cry during a film because you feel such empathy for the characters, or that moment when you feel you know exactly what the character is going through; like a deja vu of your own life. That is what is important to me. That is what is important to my project.

"State-of the art technology will change but state-of-the-heart storytelling never will" (Sid Ganis, 2006, 78th Academy Awards)

Student Comments

> 'Mine changed a lot along the way. It started off with an interactive narrative that people could sort of interact with the story, change things etc and then it kind of moved. It was fun and it was kind of a challenge at first, it was like, 'Oh let's make an interactive movie.' It was good and it was fun and I did what I set out to do in that aspect but that wasn't what I wanted and I realised about halfway through the project, there's more to it than this. And that's when I started looking at bringing it to younger people, bringing it into branding and making it sort of, more than just a story. Actually make it a brand, make it something that people can relate to, people can sort of connect with things they know. And it kind of changed from there. and I'm quite happy with what I came up with in the end.'

Screen grabs showing an interactive point in the story & a mock-up purchase

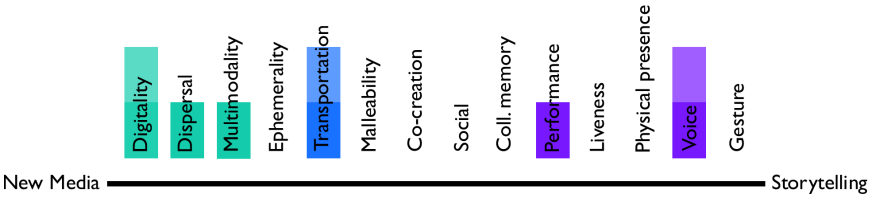
Characteristics

The project embodies four characteristics of new media, *digitality*, *dispersal* (mobility and networked concept of iTunes download and iPod distribution), *multimodality* (the mix of media and interaction devices), and *ephemerality* as presumably users would update and replace stories with new ones, which would change frequently.

Transportation is present (the project seeks to immerse user in the story in a private viewing experience by interaction and mobility), and *co-creativity*, *malleability* and *liveness* through the interactions of user and device.

Audio is important in this project hence *voice* attribute is selected. *Performance* reflects the primary creator's (i.e. actor) performance.

Five Short Films



Characteristics

The five short films (details and stills on each below) all seek to provide some level of transportation, to draw the viewer into the action. As with all of the student projects, they have *digitality*, and can be dispersed geographically and physically on disk. All the films are *multimodal* in that they all use sound and images. Regarding specific storytelling qualities, some of them make powerful use of sound and voice, and performance is present in the original creator (i.e. actor/animator).

The Wrong Medication

A short film focussing on typography

The Wrong Medication uses a contemporary setting for the story of Willie the Piper. Told by the male protagonist, the story centres around driving home to a party thrown by his partner. His senses are affected by wrongly administered medication and he accidentally hits and kills a pedestrian on

the country road. He drags the body into the woods and on his return to the car, appears to hear a cow speaking to him. The cow threatens him and tells him to murder the old couple living on the hill, but the man reflects and gains the safety of his car.

The Wolf

A trailer for a horror film

The Wolf is a trailer for a horror film. The original traveller tale is hard to find in this film. Two men argue then one leaves the house after the fight only to vanish. The only remains are a pair of shoes and drops of blood. The wolf is coming again.

The student was initially keen to focus on music and had planned on making a rock opera, but this changed once the story for the project was announced.

The Traveller

A short thriller film

The Traveller retold the story in a contemporary environment but remained quite close to the plot structure the students had originally heard. A wom-

an alone in her house in the evening heard a knock on the front door. On opening the door she finds a travelling musician (guitarist) asking for somewhere to stay. She tells him he can stay in the shed, but to be gone by morning. He thanks her and goes to the shed. She settles back into the house and then decides to take him a blanket as it is a cold night. She reaches the shed but when she opens the door she screams and runs away. The traveller's face is covered in blood and he is chewing. The plot then flashes back to the musician walking down a long country road with his guitar case. He comes across a brown paper bag with a pair of shoes in them and takes them with him.

Although it is not obvious from the finished film, the student's blog reveals more details about the plot:

> FLASH BACKS
>
> # 1. Shows the man playing gig in a small pub
>
> # 2. Shows the man walking through the countryside
>
> # 3. Shows the man finding the body and taking the boots along with the feet
>
> # 4. Walking towards a small village and approaching the first house with light on innocently.
>
> # 5. Shows the man chewing gum (explains why he is chewing when the woman finds him)
>
> # 6. Show him trying to pull out the dead foot from the boot. He gets an itch on his face so scratches it. Its dark so he does not realize that he has blood on his hands (explains why he has blood on his face!)

Lucky Me

A short black-comedy film

Lucky Me is the tale of an essentially upbeat male protagonist who discovers a dead man (with a briefcase full of money handcuffed to his wrist) at a bus stop. On realising that the briefcase does indeed contain money, he decides to take the money and dump the body. But he first has to get a car, carrying the dead man on his back. Eventually, the body and briefcase (and money) all fall into the river and the protagonist walks away with nothing, whistling. The film flashes back to tell the dead man's story. He is at the bus stop, waiting to drop off the money, gangster-style, while eating some sweets. He chokes on the candy and dies. Technically, the film is of a very high standard and the revised plot works well.

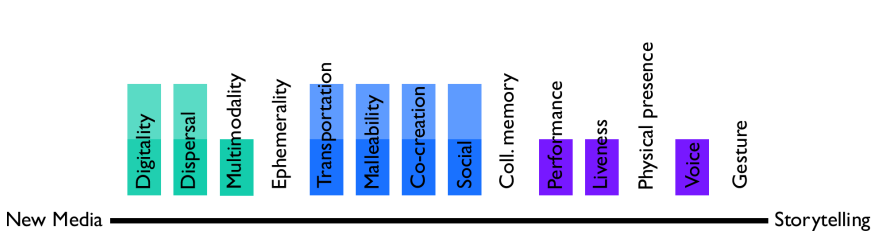
Lost Feet

A moving comic

Lost Feet was developed as a Flash animation with hand-drawn illustrations. The actual animation was quite simple—a moving comic, where characters fade or slide in and out of the shots in different poses. The soundtrack is also simple, the sound of pipes playing in a pub (The Cow's head) and there is no dialogue. Whilst the style is lovely, the animation did not reach its conclusion due to time constraints, but enough exists to give a sense of the whole story.

The tale retains its traditional quality and set-ting but provides a little more of the back story of the frozen man, who is returning home after a night out at the pub.

Machinima



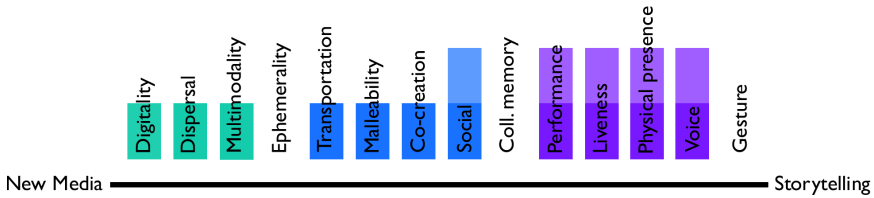
This short machinima film was created using World of Warcraft. Machinima is a process of capturing animation/live action from computer games. It requires users to control the avatars, similar to the requirement of actors in live film production. The story is told on two levels, the narrator (character with the blue glowing face below) sets up the story in a woodland glade, telling the other characters that his tale happened at a farm they all passed that afternoon. The narrator then begins to recount the story and the visuals change to describe the beggar man/traveller. The story remains very close to the version the students heard. Near the end of the tale, the action switches back to the glade and the listeners interrupt the narrator with comments about the versions of the story they know.

Characteristics

The film seeks to provide some level of *transportation*, to draw the viewer into the action. Apart from possessing *digitality* and *multimodality*, the film has social aspects through its production process. Machinima requires social interaction to be created, invariably the skill required to capture video in a games environment demands skill in said game. World of Warcraft is inherently a social activity and the student relied on support from their in-world friends to create the film. Therefore both *co-creativity* and *social* are reflected in the framework due to the creation process even though the end result is a linear narrative film like the previous set of projects. *Dispersal* is also present in creation process, users may be controlling their avatars whilst physically located across the globe. *Performance*, *liveness* and *voice* are all encompassed in the creation process too.

Educational Aid

An interactive video and accompanying written script for teachers to use with their pupils



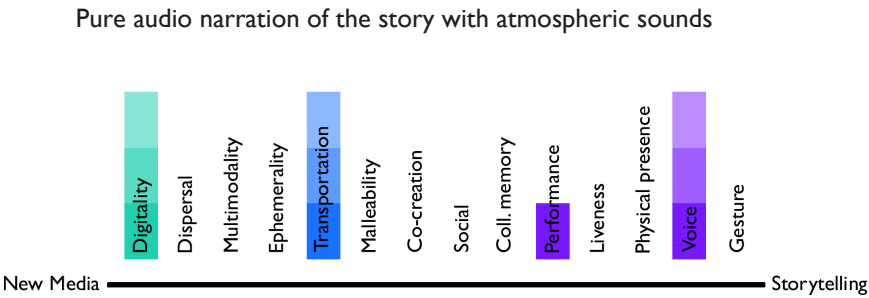
This was presented as a classroom setting, with two students acting in the school children role. Still images with text were shown on a television. At three key points in the story the animation stopped and the students were asked what should happen next. The project creator was in the role of teacher and read out options the 'children' could select. The educational aid was aimed at eight year olds, however, had not been tested with any real children to get their feedback. Whilst the final project may not have been to the highest standard, the concept of social, interactive narrative embodies several of the storytelling traits.

Characteristics

This project showed aspects of *performance*, as the teacher would have to adopt the role of narrator, *liveness* as the social interaction of the piece would have a temporal quality. The same story may end up differently depending on the pupils choices. *Physical presence* is found in the teacher narrator, and *voice* is also apparent in this role. It is *co-creative* as both narrator and children are playing key roles.

As ever, the project had aspects of *digitality*, and *multimodality* through the text, imagery and human interaction of the teacher. It sought a level of *transportation*, as evidenced through the need for imagination (children have to consider consequences of decisions). Finally, it was also *social* through interactions with the teacher and children.

Soundscape



The wind howls. Thunder reverberates round your ears. You can almost feel the driving rain. Then, a voice: 'He walks down the road, the cold rain hitting his skin. He's cold. He's shaking. In his mind he knows he needs to find shelter if he has any hope of surviving this night. This cold night.'

The accent is American. The soundscape is a parody of the tale and genre. Whilst set in a more modern environment with cars, the story keeps to the original version the students heard, with the piper gaining a house, barn, cow and boots at the end.

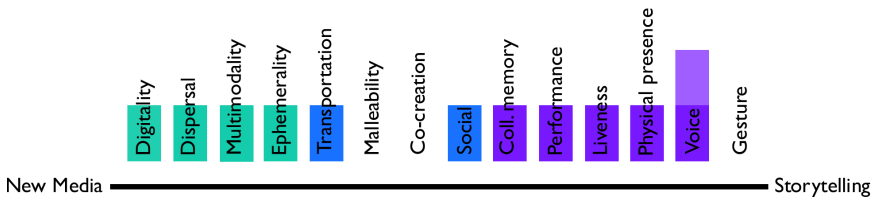
Characteristics

Voice is the key feature of this project, other sounds serve to set the atmosphere but it is the narrator's voice which drives the plot. The manner of speaking, in a slow, measured, over-exaggerated way is reminiscent of film noir. *Intent* is found in the clear telling of the tale.

Digitality is shown in the production process and distribution format (.mp3 file) and *transportation* is apparent through the use of atmospheric sounds which aim to draw the listener into the story. Imagination is engaged through the lack of visuals, in the same way that imagination is found in traditional storytelling.

Cable Fable

Cable Fable, 'the pathway to storytellers', promotes storytellers and events through an interactive phone booth which rings when it senses someone passing



This project took the story and retold it in a gossipy style via a telephone. The pay-phone (see image below) was set up with sensors to detect when someone was passing, whereupon the phone began to ring. On answering the phone, the story begins as a one sided conversation. Once completed, the voice clicks off and the story ends with, "You've been listening to Cable Fable. For more information about storytelling in your area check out www.cablefable.com."

The student initially found it difficult to engage with the project brief and went through several different ideas before settling on this audio-driven concept.

Student Comments

The journey begins. Posted on 2008-02-04 15:25

...And so the journey begins, here we are. Okay so the project is.....I'm not exactly sure but here are some key words that I have stuck the brain so far. Traditional Scottish storytelling, interactive entertainment experience, retelling stories, Remix, 'Eye to Eye, Mind to Mind, Heart to Heart' (Scottish traveller saying), Screen, sensors, music, voice, barrier, presence, performance, unique, style, Environment, Start-Middle-End, source, Seneckie (storyteller??),elaborated, themes, context, characters, noise, visuals, generations, wee callant, Pharaohs to fairies, summary, time, lost, magical...What I have really enjoyed so far are the words, I love words, some of the Scots words we have encountered so far some I know, others I don't...I'm not exactly sure

where this project is going yet but I'm really enjoying it. A couple of things said that I am going to use to keep me on the right track. 'Write from the heart not the head' 'Its more than the story told, I storyteller' 'a story has to have life- you have to believe in your characters!' How you make the story your own- 'Take the bare bones and build everything around it' 'each performance is unique' So yes, lets get reading and talking and retelling. CREATE SOMETHING THE WHOLE WORLD WILL ENJOY.

Posted on 2008-02-04 15:25

My idea as it stands now, I will have an audience participatory piece. I want to create an understanding between the traditional storyteller and the listener. I also want to explore the voice/body relationship. How does a voice affect the storytelling experience. How does a body affect the storytelling experience. Can I maintain the presence of a storyteller without actually having one in the traditional sense.

Food for thought. Literally. Posted on 2008-03-03 17:56

So on Sunday night I had a wee focus group. I made curry in exchange for their [three names omitted] time. So after I let them sit for a while enjoying the food I whipped out my notes and started asking questions. I started asking

what they thought the phrase 'storytelling' meant. For one it was that time when she was younger when just before bed dad would sit down, get a book and lull her to sleep, for the other it was a scene in a book shop with arty crafty people sitting around listening. I then told them about our storytelling night, about traditional Scottish storytelling, and our recent experiences. I then told them about the brief, what I wanted to explore. After chats and notes I stood up and gave them a rendition of the 'piper and the cow'. Which apparently didn't send them to

sleep. More questions and discussions followed. I told them about my 'stand in my shoes', swapping places with the storyteller. Explored what context my project would be used in, whether it was viable. This led to Listening, and the ability of the average person to listen. It's said that women are the worst listeners and that we just bide our time in conversations for our time to shine, is this true? So this sparked debate which lead on to gossiping, and bitching. Which lead to discussion on whether gossip and bitching is our generations form of storytelling. Do we exaggerate in stories told to make them sound more interesting to our friends? Those famous words 'you'd never guess what I just heard' always grabs someone attention…So, yeah the session has completely changed the scope and idea of my project.

My new pitch posted on 2008-02-04 15:25

After the realities of today hitting home I decided to try and undo all the wrongs and write a 'right' pitch.

"Gossip isn't scandal and it's not merely malicious. It's chatter about the human race by lovers of the same." Phyliss McGinley

Everyone loves a juicy but of gossip, even if you don't know who it is about, it is in our nature, this is the basis for the project. To be a successful storyteller you must command a presence over your audience and make a personal connection. What happens if you can't pick your audience, what do you do? Find the connection that fits the common denominator: Gossip.

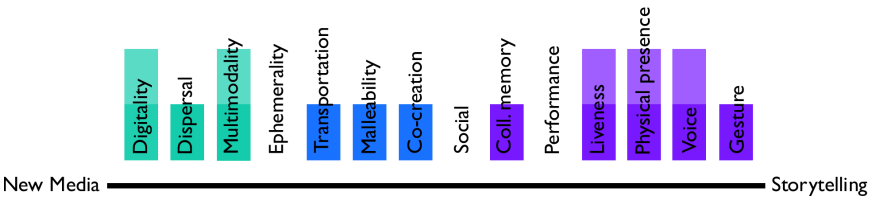
Characteristics

Voice is the main storytelling characteristics in this project. The intonation and style of speaking are crucial in keeping the user on the phone for the one-sided conversation. In the complete fulfilment of the conceptual idea *dispersal* would occur if these phone booths were rolled across multiple locations.

Digitality is found in the production process and the technical challenges of connecting a payphone to sensors and a computer. *Transportation* is present through the shared spaces of physical reality and the space of the phone conversation. *Liveness* is found in the interaction between passer-by and booth, to the user the phone may give the illusion of liveness. *Collective memory* and *social* are included as these are the aims, the story is told in hope that it will be repeated to others, like gossip.

Interactive Puppetry

Three physical puppets tell the story from their own point of view, voices change depending on which puppet is 'active' which is controlled by touching the mouths of the puppets



Three puppets sway slightly as they hang in their puppet theatre setting. There is a brown cow, with stitching running across its face and eye sockets, a ginger haired and bearded piper, in a kilt and plaid and stitched brown boots, and an old woman with a shawl round her head and an apron round her waist. All the characters have open mouths and large lips.

Hesitantly, an arm stretches forward and touches inside the piper's mouth. A light appears above his head and a voice begins to tell his tale. The arm reaches for the cow and holds the cow's mouth for a second. The light switches to above the cow now, and the narrative switches to the cow's voice and his observations of the story from the vantage point of his field.

There were several technical challenges in this project, including embedding light dependent sensors into the puppets and creating their structure around the electronics and controlling the audio files with a computer.

The story told was kept to the same traditional context and version the students were originally told, the story focus was on rewriting the story in three ways to show three points of view, revealing more aspects than the original story.

Student Comments

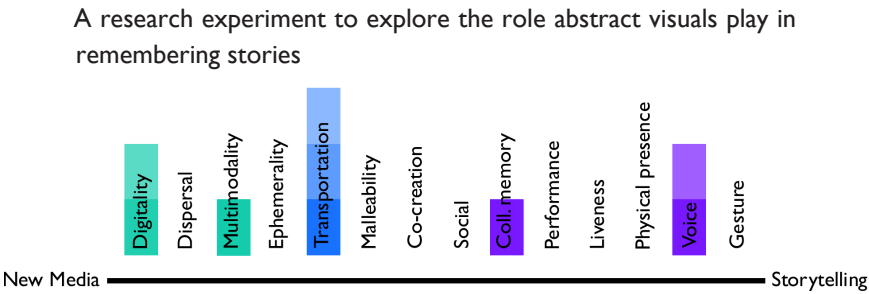
> 'I was trying to get across audience interaction mainly—it's less about the storyteller telling the story and really more about the audience being able to control the story. That's the main theme of my project… Puppetry has always been storytelling in my mind. But before I did this project I thought that was aimed at children as well, until I researched different cultures and stuff and found out it wasn't…I think in Britain it still is very child orientated, 'cos there's puppet shows on beaches and stuff like that, Punch and Judy traditional thing. I remember seeing loads in primary school as well, like shadow puppetry…I think looking back to my childhood and bringing back memories inspired me.'

Characteristics

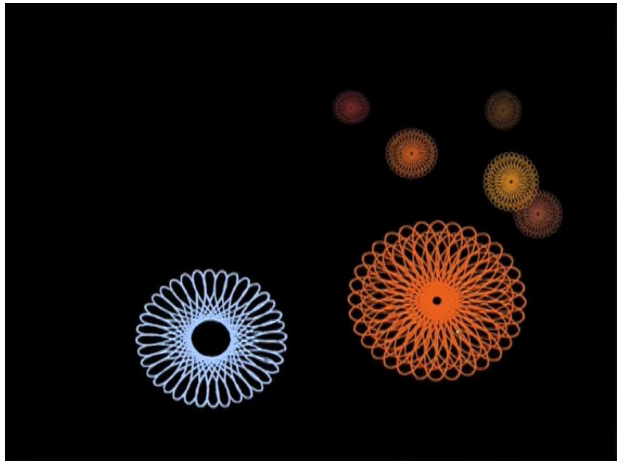
The project showed several storytelling attributes. It explored the role of *voice* through the three characters and *liveness* was emulated in the myriad ways the story could be told by changing the narrator at any point (*malleability*). *Collective memory* was present in the dynamics between characters, each character could contribute certain aspects of the tale, between them all, the complete story is told. Similarly, this interaction between the characters allows the project to discover aspects of authenticity; each role shares the authenticity by revealing their 'true' version of the story.

In terms of new media characteristics, aside from *digitality* and *multimodality* the puppets showed a pseudo-dispersed element. For all intents and purposes, the audio or story for each character was embedded in the puppet as its story. *Co-creativity* was found in the interaction between viewer and puppets.

Emotional Storytelling



At the far end of the studio two makeshift booths are set up, shrouded in black fabric. Inside each is a chair and a desk with a computer and a set of headphones laid out. On the screen a DVD is loaded with the instructions to press 'Play'. In one booth the DVD plays, showing images of spirographs which morph in and out in different colours, patterns and sizes whilst a voice tells the story of I the Piper. In the other booth, when 'play' is selected, the DVD simply shows a black screen as the same voice tells the same story, without any visual stimulus.



wk 5-when did it get this far into semester? Posted on 2008-02-11 17:44
oh dear, half way through semester!
…Just been spending the last week thinking of ideas. One think that has really stuck out for me with storytelling is how it evokes emotion in the viewer. I'm thinking of exploring this idea, right now thinking an interactive program on flash to allow users to use different animations to convey the emotions they are feeling at different points in the story…

Visualising emotions...need some help! Posted on 2008-02-11 21:52
be in touch with your emotions
Ok, think deep inside and think about how you feel. I want you to try and visualise your emotions. Imagine I a tiny spark inside your head that is reacting different ways to different emotions. For me, when I am happy it is nice bright colours and is jumping and bouncing about in my head in fluttery movements. However when I am angry it changes into deeper colours and is thumping in my head with harsh movements. When I am sad it grows faint and gets slower in its movements. How do you feel with different emotions? What happens when your scared or confused or disgusted? Any answers would be greatly appreciated.

Reflection on project posted on 2008-05-03 23:39
reflection on the presentations and festival
Well its all over now. Had the presentations and the festival yesterday. I have thoroughly enjoyed this module and am happy with my project. The results that I have managed to conclude from the project were exactly what I was hoping for. The people who watched the animation gave a lot more detailed answers in the questionnaire, taking into account and mentioning the emotions which were being conveyed in the animation. Whereas the people who listened to just the audio only quoted directly from the voiceover, proving that if the animation was watched the viewer would process the story better and therefore remember it and manage to retell it.

Student Comments

'I did a research based project which is looking at if you invoke the emotions in a story if it will make the user remember the story better.

So I made up a short animation which visualised the emotions that I felt, well I and other people felt conveyed, or being conveyed in the story. And then did a test so people listened to just the story, or people listened to the story and watching the movie to see if they would remember the story better. And they did!' The student laughs happily.

'Even out of the things I got from the exhibition, 'cos I had some questionnaires there as well, you definitely could tell that there was some correlation with the animation and the emotion and the memory, so it was good. And there's been loads of work done about the topic, in different places. So I was just enhancing it to see if I could actually prove it myself.'

'So what made you pick up on the idea of emotions?' I asked.

'I thought that was the one thing that was important about live storytelling—the fact that it did invoke emotion in the listener and you could totally feel the emotion from the storyteller. Like, if it was a story they liked telling then they were so emotional towards it, like telling it, that I thought that was really important. So I wanted to look more into that and then I came across this quote on the inter-net that talked about memory, which is important if you're retelling a story to memorise it better.'

Characteristics

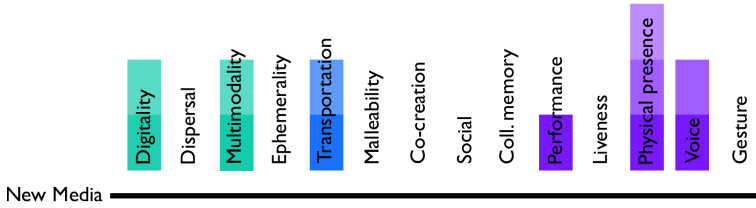
Emotional Storytelling examined issues of memory and imagination, attempting to identify if emotionally charged visuals make any difference to the quality of the remembered story.

Digitality was present in the creation process (Adobe Flash software) and digital format. *Multimodality* was shown through the mix of pure audio, and audio and visuals. *Collective memory* was included as an attribute due to the follow up questions from the student regarding users memory of the story as heard (with and without visuals).

Transportation was also deemed to play a key role in the project, as the student wanted the user to engage imagination and emotion to be able to remember the story more effectively. Memory and imagination are closely linked with *authenticity* and truth, therefore these attributes have been considered to be part of this project (subsumed in *transportation*).

Face Fable

A physical 3D sculpted face, framed with black fabric, which tells a story through rear projected images



Imagine a glowing, disembodied face staring at you. Shifting sideways slightly, you can see that the profile looks correct, except the mouth—there are no lips. A pair of real glasses sit perched on the bridge of the mask's nose. It stands child height tall and reminds you disturbingly of ET, with his hunched shoulders and awkward stance. Its body is black and oddly shaped. In front of the glowing face are three child-height black stools. Now seated, you are at eye height with the creature. It blinks at you. Two buttons are underneath the face, one marked *play* and the other *stop*. You press *play*. The mask begins to talk, eyes roaming, projected mouth moving. It tells the tale of Willie the Piper.

This project attempted to simulate the live, physical presence of a storyteller. Early on in the module, the student felt that he could not better the traditional storytelling experience so wanted to explore the notion of presence.

Thoughts on my project so far posted on 2008-02-08 16:21

We have to present our project proposal on Tuesday 12th Feb, here are my ideas so far.

The story that we will be working with is 'The Piper's Boots'. The challenge that we have been given is to produce a digital interactive version of this Scottish story. From all of the storytelling sessions that we have had so far, I've found that I am interested in the live performance element of traditional storytelling and I would like to investigate how this can be re-created digitally. I believe that the live element of storytelling is what captivates the audience

like a video cannot. I'm going to think over the weekend as to how I can make digital storytelling feel like a live performance. Stay tuned.

Projection problems posted on 2008-02-19 18:23

After speaking to Ali today I have revised some of the projection aspects of my idea, I would like to try and use rear-projection onto a transparent or translucent head. After searching online for some time however, I can only seem to find glass heads. This is a problem as I would like to cut away the back half of the head so that the image would not be distorted until it hit the 'face'. One alternative to this would be to buy a cheap polystyrene head and to vacuum form an acrylic face over it. My concern about this approach would be the size of the vacuum forming machine available within Duncan of Jordanstone, it's not very big.

In the meantime I will buy a few polystyrene heads so that I can continue with my experimentation, and I'll keep searching for that elusive transparent plastic head.

Student Comments

'And so your project then, you were trying to—?' I prompt.

'It was almost like trying to attain what we started with.' He laughs. 'I mean, it sounds like quite a strange way of going about it, and it didn't come to me at the first week…At first it was trying to bring back a bit of the, you know, the realist—the physical presence of the storyteller. But in the end, I really realised that it was—you're trying to bring back the storyteller. Certainly the face, I thought, was the most important element. And er, any other way of going about it just seemed to be, skirting around the issue perhaps, which was to really engage with the media, which was a storyteller. You know, it's a living breathing media.

'There's so much that is going on when they're telling a story, you know, it's visual, it's audiable, erm it's also you have that, that almost undectect—you know, you can't really put your finger on what it is. But it's something that even with my project, you'll never really get. You know, that person there at the time.…When a storyteller stands up it was a very strong media, it was very direct, it caught people's attention. It was incredibly effective. When we tried to tell a story on video, it was just like any other video, it could have been anything.'

'And so do you think your project worked, do you think it did what you set out to achieve?' I ask.

'Yeah, I think it worked quite well, to an extent. I don't think it's possible to cheaply or in 14 weeks that we had, to recreate with almost no difference to the presence of the storyteller, which was certainly my aim. But I was also realistic, my actual intention when compared to my aim was just to get, you know, something that would demonstrate rather, the possibilities of simulating something as acutely direct as a storyteller standing up in a room.

'And I mean it had side-effects as well, my project, because it was projected through a mask. You get this really bright face, you know, but in a dark room, is a very eye-catching thing, but this is very similar to putting a spotlight on someone on stage…but it was still only ever meant to be demonstrative of what we should maybe, or what could be a direction for further study.

'At the very start we all found it really difficult because I think the problem was we didn't know what was expected of us. And there was a lot of emphasis at the start on engaging with the story and I hoped that at the end I sort of demonstrated that you didn't have to engage with the story as such, it was more like, in mine, I engaged with the medium itself and it was a different way of telling a story without re-writing it or anything like that. The version that I gave to the actor was copied and pasted from the one that was on Spartan [name of student blog system]. My retelling was a medium.'

'Do you think there's a place for traditional storytelling in today's society?' I ask.

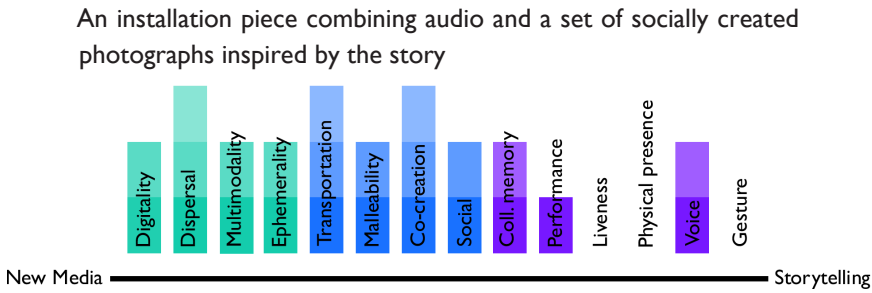
He nods his head. 'Yeah, I just think that we need to be aware of- of the shortcomings of our digital media and the problems that can arise from using them too much, or not being restrained or respectful when you use them. I think sometimes when you try and enhance storytelling it's maybe even disrespectful, you know, of the original telling. That's one thing I was aware of so I wanted my re-telling to be almost like a tribute, as opposed to, "Isn't this better!" It was never meant to be better.'

Characteristics

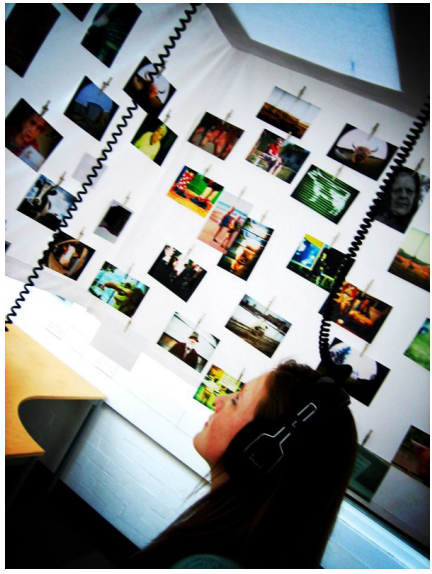
This project clearly focused on the *physical presence* and *voice* of the storyteller (and to a lesser extent, *performance*). In doing so, it raised issues of *authenticity*, did the projected story told by a disembodied face have authenticity?

New media characteristics present were undoubtedly *digitality*, *multimodality* (in the physical manifestation of the face, the audio and the video of the speaking face) and *transportation* in the aim to replicate a storyteller and the story.

Picture This



The area is marked off with a white cube made of fabric hanging from the ceiling of the studio. There are 'windows' cut out of the fabric affording a look inside the box. Photographs thread across the interior, and two pairs of headphones dangle down in the centre of the space. Underfoot is a patch of fresh turf, green and fragrant. Upon entering the cube and donning the headphones, a woman's voice begins to tell the story of Willie the Piper. As you listen to her warm voice the photographs draw your attention. They are randomly spaced out, a cow here, a pair of shoes there, an old woman, a pair of red trainers with white laces here.



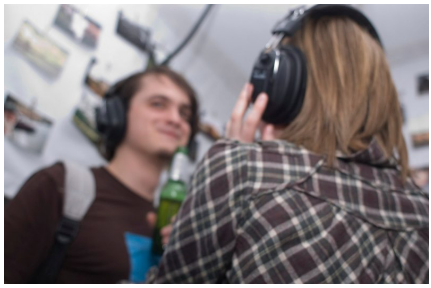
The photographs displayed are partly the student's own images but also gathered from an online photographic community the student is part of. The project therefore draws on the social networking paradigm. Quite early on in the module progress the student had decided on using photography and audio.

Student Comments

> 'In terms of your project, what was your main aim for it? What were you trying to get across?' I ask.
>
> 'The connection between pictures and story. Everybody has a different story behind the pictures. So you take a picture and there's a story behind it but other people can see different things within the picture. So I was trying to connect the two and allow people to connect different words to different images and see if different people's ideas were inspired by the story would make other people inspired by it, if that makes sense.'
>
> 'And do you think it was successful?'
>
> 'Yeah. I think it came off really successful. I think erm, one of the storytellers towards the end of the night was praising me. She's was like—it was amazing—'cos she was standing there, listening and she could, "Oh there's the cow!"' He points to the imaginary photo-graph. '"There's this," and "This."' He rolls his eyes.
>
> 'She really liked—she was a big fan of my project which kind of got me all fired up. So, I think it worked really well. I think it was quite well received.'
>
> 'And so,' I say, prompting, 'remind me, the images you took. You took about half of them?'
>
> 'Yeah. I think overall I had about ninety-something images. I took about half of them. Actually I didn't put all mine up in the project. And the rest came from people responding to the story, listening to the story and going out and taking pictures, or had pictures they'd thought of—thought of that picture they'd taken and then they sent it to me.'
>
> The student had asked a storyteller to record the tale and then posted the audio file online, asking photographers to respond with images.

'Do you think your project was an example of storytelling when it was finished?' I ask as my final question.

'I think it was. I think it was an example of storytelling—it's kind of, like a movie but not moving pictures almost. There was a story there, that didn't change. There was the images that people connect with the story so I think when you listen to a story you can see a kind of picture forming in your mind's eye. And when you see a picture you're kind of like, "Oh, that's that!"' He points again at another imaginary photograph. 'So I think it worked.'

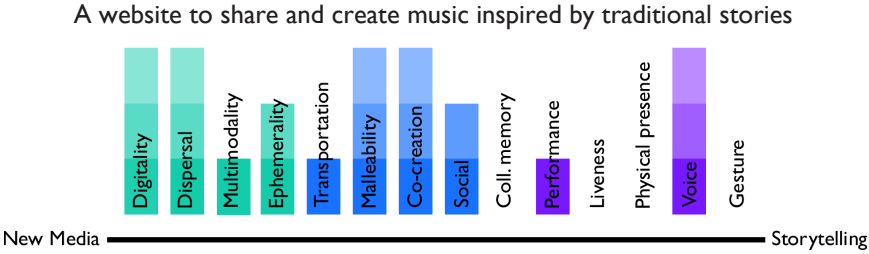


Characteristics

This project captured a lot of storytelling and new media attributes. It showed diversity in the images which were generated by a range of photographers, and similarly showed *collective memory* in the same way. The memory of the story was distributed amongst viewers and contributors. So *dispersal*, *malleability* and *co-creativity* are also covered by the social collaboration of the project in obtaining content, but *dispersal* is found in the distributed nature of images and connectivity through the internet too. *Voice* is a key component, as the story told through the headphones provides an environment in which to set the images. This also gives a sense of *transportation*. Imagination is engaged as a viewer by observing the range of images and hearing the story, but also by the contributors who sought to respond to the story. The project has elements of *ephemerality* in that the images online change and adapt depending on the latest ones posted. Likewise, it is *social* and encourages the sharing of stories through images (i.e. *collective memory*) via the website.

Multimodality was found in the physical installation, photographs, audio and grass underfoot providing three modes of engagement.

Interactive Music Network



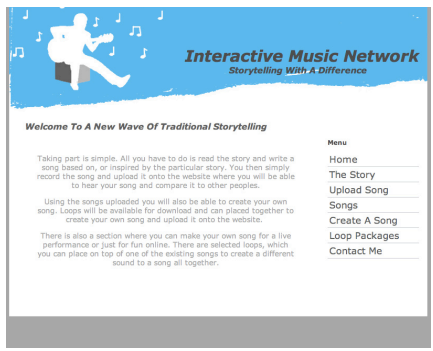
The *Interactive Music Network* was a website designed to facilitate the sharing and creation of songs inspired by traditional tales. A text version of the story was posted on the site and musicians were encouraged to read the story and respond with a song or piece of music. The songs could be uploaded and listened to on the site and there was also an option for creating music online from loop samples. The student created two short videos to explain and promote the site. One was designed for YouTube whilst the other was to explain the aims of the project;

I started the interactive music network a few months ago. I was interested in the values of traditional storytelling. This was originally used as a way to pass on knowledge throughout families or to bring communities together. I am interested in revising this tradition on a much larger scale and want to create a world wide community that interact through stories…I don't just want people to upload music but also upload stories, so that people can take their stories and be inspired by them also. The songs will be under a creative commons license which means people can use the songs all over the world…Together we can start a new wave of traditional storytelling.

Transcript from video

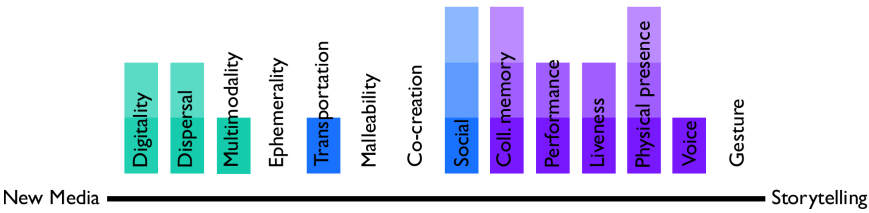
Characteristics

The *Interactive Music Network* demonstrates all of the new media characteristics. It is not only *multimodal* (although primarily *voice* or audio driven) but also *dispersed*, accessible on the Internet; it is *co-creative*, actively encouraging musicians to produce content. It shows *ephemerality* in that song order changes once newer content has been uploaded. It is inherently *social*, not only offering the chance to upload original work but giving the chance to create alternative remixes of tracks (*malleability*). The project shows *diversity* through the range of songs and the potential for a range of stories to spark musical inspiration. *Transportation* is also found in the need for creative response to the stories.

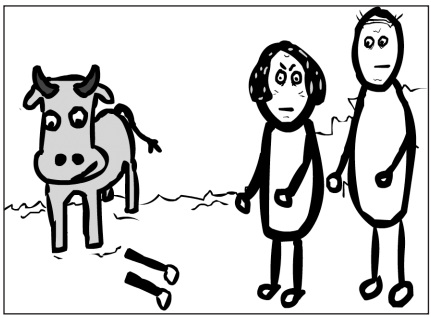


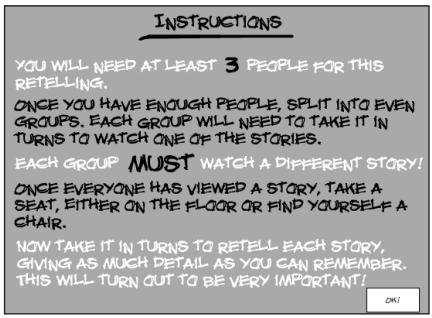
The Cow that Ate the Piper

A set of three animations showing different parts of the story requiring discussion amongst viewers to piece together the whole story



The Cow that Ate the Piper is a series of Flash animations that split the tale into parts. For the final exhibition, the student set up three computers running the animations and had a seating area for viewers to discuss the story sections after viewing. The animations are of a simple stickmen style, inspired by the web comic series *Cyanide and Happiness* and YouTube phenomenon *Simon's Cat*. The only audio is ambient music and the three story aspects tell the tale from three points of view, namely the old man (who becomes the corpse the piper takes the boots from), the piper himself and the old woman who allows the piper to stay in the barn.





Narratives - visual or audio...? posted on 2008-03-11 17:30

I've finally filled in the gaps of my story, had a look at what style of animation I'm going to be using and now I'm faced with the question of how I'm going to narrate the story. I feel this is a really important element if I'm going to try and encourage people to use some kind of imagination when retelling the sto-

ry. Most stories have a narrator telling the story, I want to eliminate this and just have the events, allowing the person watching the story to fill in the details between the main events in the story and to describe what they see.

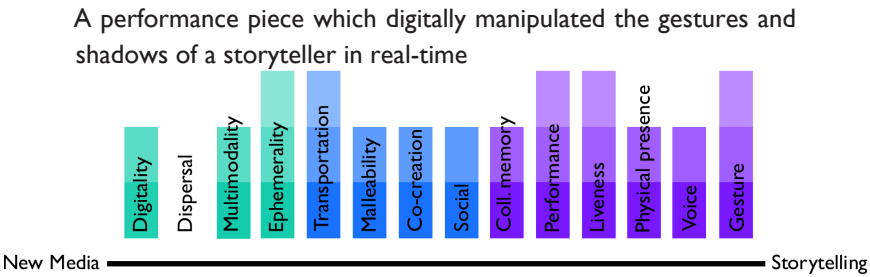
I Underestimated Storytelling... posted on 2008-03-24 19:01
I was in London at the weekend for Easter and it seems this whole brief has made me a good bit more aware of storytelling in it's various forms.
For example, I was already aware of Transport for London's "Art on the Underground" scheme but stupidly thought it only stretched as far as the occasional poster of art work stuck amongst the vast sea of adverts on every single surface on the underground. I was sitting on a District line train from Stepney Green to Westminster when I spotted something amongst the adverts... it was a Chinese Proverb not too dissimilar to those which we were reading in the studio a few weeks ago. I suppose it's something that's always been there but I've just never taken the time to notice. Incidentally, the scheme also includes a massive panda face and caravan on one of the platforms at Gloucester Road station... can't say I've spotted either of those either.
Then roughly an hour later I was on the Strand, famous for musicals and shows. There was one show branding itself as "Modern Day Fairy-Tale" and instantly thought of [student] when she was explaining about the series of modern day fairy tales on tv. The show, "Into The Hoods", is a modern day interpretive street dance adaptation of Stephen Sandheim's "Into the Woods".

Characteristics

This project focused on *collective memory*, the dispersal of knowledge amongst people. By making sure that each person or group only saw one section of the story, collectively viewers had to work together to understand the whole story (*social*, *physical presence*, *liveness* and *performance*). The project managed to bridge the gap between digital computing and traditional storytelling. This involved users engaging *imagination* and *co-creation* as the simplicity of the animations still left a lot unsaid. The project also explored issues of authenticity as each viewer would have to retell the story section they had watched.

The Cow that Ate the Piper was not only a *social* and *co-creative* project but incorporated many new media characteristics too through *multimodal* ways of communicating and *digitality*.

Shadow Telling



This project was demonstrated at the final exhibition as a live performance and was probably the most technically challenging project of all. A storyteller told a version of the tale to a live audience. She was dressed all in black and stood in front of a large, white screen. As she spoke, distorted shadows were projected onto the screen. The images rippled and swirled and echoed (most apparent when the teller used her hands). When it grew dark in the tale, a silvery moon hung in the sky upon the screen. The screen was manipulated by the student using a modified mixing desk connected to a computer and projector setup.

Throughout the module, the student worked closely with the traditional storyteller to get feedback and direction on the gesture manipulation. As can be evidenced from the student's blog entries, this caused the student to reflect on many aspects of storytelling.

A starting point posted on 2008-01-31 01:46

The past couple of weeks has definitely opened my eyes to the world of story telling and its massive role in our everyday lives but also that it is such a powerful medium for information, socialising and humour. It has sparked many memories from my childhood of story time at school to bedtime stories to telling tales with my friends. What I find particularly appealing is the engaging nature of story telling: you become emerged in another persons words for up to 20 minutes and the teller becomes the centre of your world. Acting as a God creating sights, sounds and smells purely through words.

This lead me to wonder how much work is the story teller really doing and how much is our own imagination? A good story teller can set the scene beautifully and immaculately for the listener to interpret but then its up to listener to fully engage their imagination. So how can you increase the likelihood of the listener to engage with the story? My thoughts are that you could do it via visual stimulation. It would be easy to stick up a few pictures in the background but how do you make it an interactive experience?

When watching the story tellers I have noticed that hand gestures and body language play an important role in telling the story. Gestures help the teller emphasise and add their own personality to the story. This is an area I would like to look into further because if I can exaggerate the gestures of the teller further using digital media I can provide a more all round engaging experience. By allowing this the teller could bring more of their own personality to the story.

Todays Thoughts posted on 2008-02-05 23:16

After really considering what I want to do with this project I have come up with this basic outline. The aspect of story telling that interests me is the gestures and body language of the teller and how they help express the story. Each teller has their own gestures and ways of telling stories but this body language always complements the story. Therefore, I want my digital media to do the same and be in harmony with the teller and their story[...]

Meeting with [storyteller] posted on 2008-03-24 18:02

I arranged a meeting with [storyteller] (my storyteller for the project) last Monday in the studio so that we could discuss the story and I could show her what I was working on…I got [storyteller] to tell me her version of the story

and there were some notable differences mostly to give the story better continuity and clarity for the listener. From her telling I picked up 3 main points: one was that the moon is essential in the story and must be emphasised, there is a light in the distance which is the farmers cottage which acts as a sign of hope in the middle of the story and there is a distinct change in feeling to the story when the boy goes into the farmers house for porridge. These 3 elements will be picked out an put on top of the video feed as premade videos. A full moon will appear in the top corner of the screen when [storyteller] mentions that it is starting to get dark. The light will appear high up on the canvas as the boy is relieved when the coach goes past him. The final effect will make the screen seem warmer and glow a light orange and red when the boy is in the farmer's house. As the story will change slightly due to the performance nature of the piece I plan to have all three of these videos controlled by a mixer that I will use during the live performance....
Another thing I noticed when [storyteller] was telling the story was that she uses peaks and troughs to keep the audience interested. [storyteller] builds tension in the story by using the tone of her voice and physical gestures as the plot builds she becomes louder and more animated. She then reaches her peak and tails the story off until it is time to build it up again. This technique is not only great for the listeners but it something I can link my media to. As she builds up the tension I want to build up the shadow and make it bigger to give [storyteller] a much greater presence. I hope that the live manipulation of this rising and falling will lead to a nice harmony of the telling and the shadow.

The Final Post – Reflection posted on 2008-05-02 00:39

As the name suggests this will be the last post for this project, I want to use it as a reflection over the project and an aid for writing my pitch for tomorrow. From the brief I wanted to reinterpret the story through digital media by creating a harmony between digital media and traditional storytelling…Shadows were the perfect way to integrate the traditional and digital, they could act as a moderator between disciplines. After some musing over the idea I started looking into the manipulation of shadow and how this would effect the audience. I also felt that I could preserve the traditional aspects of storytelling by having a live teller with a digitally projected shadow behind. This shadow could then be used to help tell the story and play with audience perception of what is real and what was digital.

> One of the major tasks of this project was to find a storyteller who would be happy to participate and who preferably knew the story. I managed to find [storyteller], through Debbie, she is very much a traditional, purist storyteller who has an adversity to technology. I felt that this was great; if I could convince someone who was working in the industry and was opposed to my work, to accept digital media into their performance I would be able to prove the validity of digital media in storytelling and create an entertaining experience for an audience. It was fair to say that myself and [storyteller] had our differences in opinion at the start of the project and I feel that this helped as we both had to justify our working methods. I now feel that the reason some story tellers have an adversity to using technology in their performances is that they are scared of being overpowered and the media and there being a loss of this personal connection between teller and listener. I had to convince [storyteller] that what I was proposing was a harmony of the two techniques and the digital media would create a harmony to help the story and give a more engaging experience for the audience.
>
> I am happy to say that by explaining my project and giving simple demonstrations I have removed [storyteller]'s fear of digital media and she is happy to perform using my system. I feel that the relationship I have built with [storyteller] has given me valuable insight into the story telling world and enabled me to get invaluable feedback…Overall I feel that I have created a successful project not only by its outcome but by building the relationship with a story teller and getting an insight into their world. It has helped me understand some of today's conflicts that technology can have with tradition and I feel I have shown that the two can work together in harmony.

Student Comments

'Did you find it quite challenging working with a traditional storyteller?' I ask, smiling.

'Erm, yeah it was, to begin with. Very challenging, to get her to accept what I was trying to do. She just didn't really grasp the concept I don't think. And because er, of course her generation has never really been involved in computing and kinda grown up with it as the way mine has. And even my mum and dad have, to kinda get them to understand that the digital media is not just a screen, it's not just, like a TV or a computer, or a playstation or whatever. That it can be so many

more things and it can be so much more engaging than just someone sitting there. So to get her to understand that and kinda get her to understand what I was doing was quite challenging. But it was quite rewarding because every time I put something forward she would put something against. So then I had to justify to myself, or consider her point, 'Am I really justified in what I'm saying, or, or is [storyteller] right? Do I really need this or is it just a waste of time?' So it made me question myself as well as get answers off her. I think it worked well, especially towards the end. We kind of managed to feed back off each other quite well. But at the start it was maybe a bit more icy and er, not quite argumentative, but opposing viewpoints.'

'Did you find she was quite resistant to technology?'

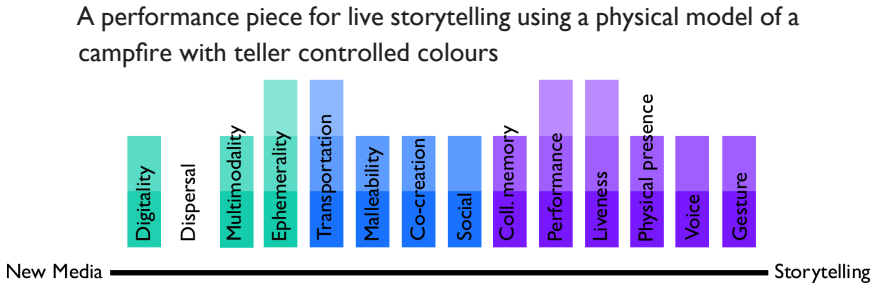
'Well to begin with yeah, she seemed quite resistant but then when I got—I think when I got her to understand what it was that I was doing, she became a bit more receptive to it. That it was gonna help the story. She felt that it'd mebbe detract from the story or distract the people from, her attention, from what, as she was telling the story. That she understood what I was trying to do was make the story, make them feel as if they were in the story and kinda more involved with it, and a more engaging experience. Once she realised that, I think she felt that she was quite happy to use it.'

Characteristics

This project was closely connected to traditional storytelling, an augmentation rather than an alternative or a replacement. Unsurprisingly therefore, many storytelling attributes are contained. *Diversity* as the project could be used or transposed to other stories and tellers, *performance* as the piece obviously favours performance and gesture-rich tales, *liveness* through the live rendition and live gesture manipulation of the story, *physical presence* as the physical teller in front of the audience is key to the shadows. *Gesture* is another core attribute along with performance.

Shadow Telling also demonstrated many new media attributes, including *ephemerality* through the live nature of the performance, *co-creativity* between the teller and the shadow manipulator and the listeners, and *multimodality* through the mix of imagery and voice from the teller and technology.

Digital Campfire



The mock fire glows orange. 'Evening came and the sky turned red.' The teller waves his hand and obediently, the fire glows red. He sits cross-legged as he tells the story of Willie the Piper, a row of people clustered round the other side of the fire. It is covered with thin sticks or twigs, and the glowing, translucent centre is moulded as if it were made of coals. Throughout the tale the fire changes colour, green for the eyes of the woman, blue for the cold night air and orange for the dawn.

The fire itself is a projector, controlled by a computer, the teller controls the colours through a sensor at the back of the fire. A ring on his hand interacts with the sensor. By subtly moving his hand, the colours change, without a pause in the telling.

Student Comments

'My aim was to er, there was two aims. There was one aim that I've always gone with in all my work, which is to take technology away from the desktop, which I think is a big part of my course, like, interactive media design. I think that's what it's really all about, like erm, making computing more ubiquitous. And another part was erm, rather than replace storytelling, which is something that I didn't want to do, didn't think should be done. I wanted to just make something that would aid storytellers, so I made the campfire that aided the story without taking the focus of the storyteller.'

'And how successful do you think it was?' I ask.

'I think it was quite successful. I achieved the aim of the focus. When I had [storyteller] telling the story, the focus was still very much on [storyteller] with the—the campfire was his sidekick rather than something that would take over the story. So em, and I felt that, when it was working it did sort of like emphasise what he was saying rather than take over it again. So, yeh I think it was pretty successful. I'm happy with how it turned out. I was happy to see a storyteller use it successfully as well because that was the first time. He'd practised with it but that was the first time a full story had been told with the campfire and it went quite well.'

'Did you get any feedback from [storyteller] about it?'

'Yeh, he liked it. He suggested that I took it to different storytelling festivals as something to show other storytellers and er, present it to people.'

'Did you get any feedback from the other storytellers—did anyone else have a view?'

'Yeh, I think er, [another storyteller]'s husband wanted to take it away with him.' He laughs. 'She really liked it as well…they were both really positive about it. They really liked that it was, like I say, it wasn't replacing storytelling but just helping storytelling.'

'Have your views of storytelling changed over the course of the module?' I inquire.

'Erm, yeah, well.' 'Cos I've been properly introduced to it and 'cos I've met some of the people who do it. Speaking to [storyteller] was a big

> influence on my project and on my views of storytelling 'cos he was really like interested in the magic of storytelling and how it would bring people together in the campfire. And there's an atmosphere that's unparalleled to anything else when you're sitting in the campfire telling a story. And that kind of thing really was inspirational to my project and to my views on storytelling. So yeh, they've changed—a respect for storytellers I guess.'

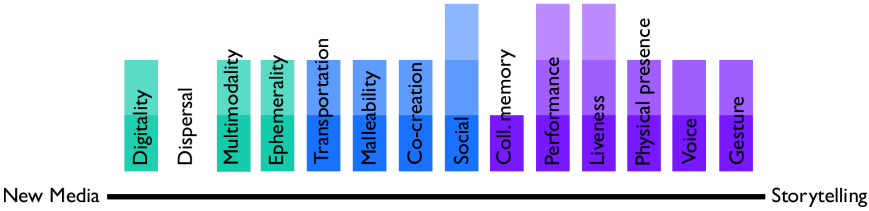
Characteristics

This hybrid storytelling-new media project displayed many storytelling attributes. It combined a *live performance* and imagination through the enhancement of a digital campfire, encompassing *voice* and *gesture* (in particular through the sensor to change the fire colour). In terms of new media characteristics, it showed *digitality*, *multimodality* and *ephemerality* through the live nature of the event and the interaction between teller and technology.

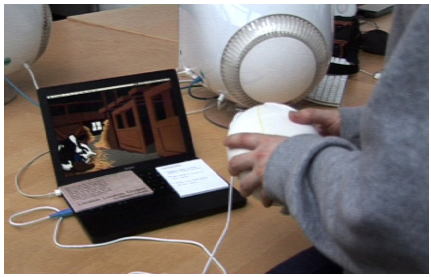
Crucially, it incorporated a *social* dimension to the performance, the physical hub of the telling was the campfire.

Interactive Storytelling Aid

A soft, rugby sized ball was developed to give the storyteller control of the intensity and type of image projected onto a screen behind them



This project was designed as a performance piece. The student wanted to reflect on the live nature of storytelling and the ability the teller has to react to the audience. His response to this issue was to create sets of images for various parts of the story which reflected different interpretations (in this instance he chose to represent light and dark versions of the tale). The teller could then tell the story live, as normal, but with the images projected behind them for the listeners to view. Through use of a hand held squeezable ball, the teller could switch between the sets of images to reflect the audience and teller requirements. For example, if the storyteller wanted to portray a more dark interpretation of the story, the image could change to reflect this.



Despite not testing the product with storytellers, the key concept remains intriguing. More than one storyteller I know of use images to supplement their tales, though usually in an explanatory way (for example, showing children an illustration of a flamingo, or the construction of a travellers bow tent).

Student Comments

'In terms of your project, what was your main aim?' I ask.

'Not to go too far into the technology side and move too far away from the traditional storytelling. I wanted to keep that because it seemed like storytellers were maybe a bit, not nervous, but just a bit, sort of—they didn't want to completely digitise everything that they were doing. I think they—the one-on-one personal element to the storytelling or traditional storytelling; there was a bit of fear that that might be lost through the videos or things like that.'

'And so did you do it because you thought it was important to you or to the storytellers?'

'To the storytellers. When I was trying to get my head around the brief it seemed like that was an important point that they made and not to stray away too far from traditional storytelling.'

'And so how successful do you think your project was in achieving that aim?'

'Quite successful in those aims, maybe not so much on a technical side.' He laughs. 'Just like, didn't quite get all the electronic parts worked out, but on that side it was quite well I think.'

'And did you get any feedback from storytellers on the evening?'

'Just at the exhibition on the evening there were a few people. I don't know if they were all storytellers or if some of them were just people. Like I don't know if they were people's parents and things but I got loads of quality feedback there, especially from the children. I don't know whose children they were, there were a few sets of kids running

around. They seemed to spend enough time with it! Which I hadn't really expected 'cos it wasn't aimed at children at all.'

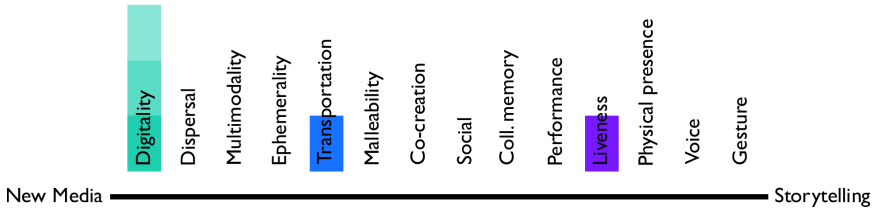
Characteristics

Once again, the example of a hybrid performance piece of new media storytelling ranks highly in terms of storytelling characteristics. This project focused on the uniqueness of each telling of a story (*liveness*). The *co-creative* force of the telling between story, teller and listener is heightened through the direct manipulation of the projected images. *Gesture* is incorporated through the tactile interface, and diversity shown through the ability to apply this technique to any story.

The project is *social* through the interaction of the teller and listeners and *malleable* by the very nature of the interactive imagery. *Ephemerality* is through the relative ease with which the concept could be extended to more stories, and *transportation* is shown through the live storytelling experience.

Digital Tapestry

A digital, programmed tapestry which slowly moves in a simulated wind



This project produced an image of the story, similar to a story map or storyboard, to tell the tale. The image was used as a texture and applied using Processing (an open source visual programming language for program images, animation, and interactions). The tapestry undulates slightly, presuming reacting to simulated gravity or under the effects of a physics engine.

Characteristics

This project showed little correlation to traditional storytelling attributes. It was digital and 'live' in nature as it was mathematically created and responded to simulated effects mathematically. In this way, it had elements of liveness in that the movements of the tapestry were not predefined, rather the result of a computer algorithm and on some level it aimed at transportation to visually tell the story.

14.3 Summary

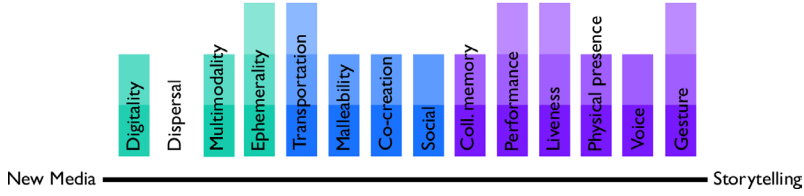
This chapter has presented the results from the Interactive Media Design case study, which challenged students to retell a tradition story (*Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots*) using digital means. Chapter 15 will examine and analyse these results, reflecting on the use of the *lens for reflection* as a tool to explore new media-storytelling objects.

Chapter 15
Analysis & Further Applications

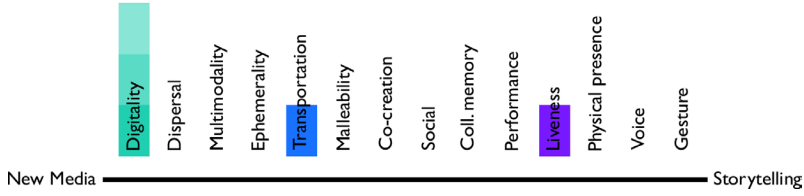
The previous chapter showed the spectrum framework developed in the Bridge section as applied to the main case study, The ReTelling. This chapter discusses the use of the framework and examines its benefits by focusing on two projects from the case study. Through this focused reflection a more generalised overview of the framework emerges, and the framework is subsequently used to explore the attributes of four commercial new media applications.

15.1 The ReTelling Spectrum

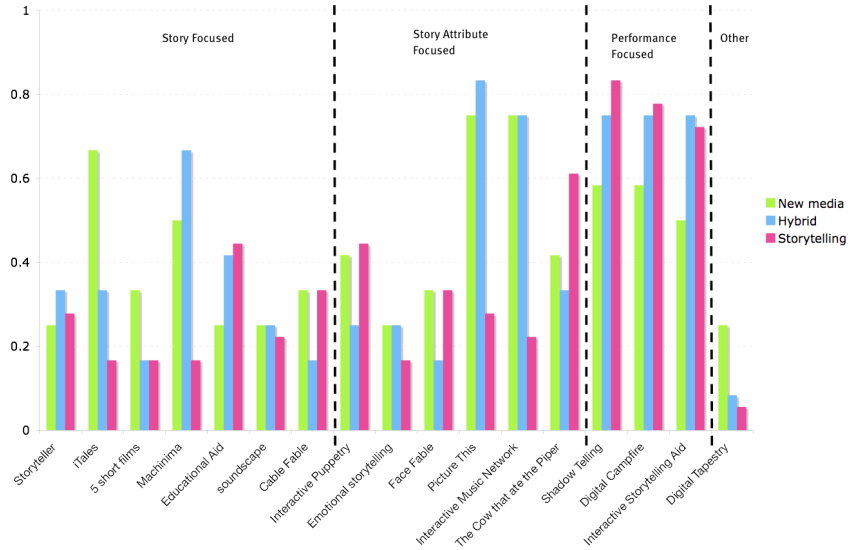
The results from the student projects represent a wide range of the spectrum, from the Shadow Telling (chapter 14, p. 313);



to the Digital Tapestry (chapter 14, p.322);



Before we examine exactly what this spectrum or lens for reflection tells us about each project, it is worth comparing the spread of attributes across the projects. The graph below collates all the spectrum results, and carves the spectrum into three bands, new media (consisting of the lower third, digitality, dispersal, multimodality and ephemerality), hybrid (consisting of the middle band, transportation, malleability, co-creation and social), and storytelling (the remaining top attributes of collective memory, performance, liveness, physical presence, voice and gesture). The weighted instances for each attribute (ranging from 0-3) were totalled and normalised for each project (see appendix E) and then plotted to give the following graph.



The graph is sectioned off into four types, *story focused*, *story attribute focused*, *performance focused* and *other*. These types correlate to the summary of project results in chapter 14 which is reproduced for reference with descriptions below.

Story-focussed (eleven projects)
(Mainly presented through conventional screen-based media)

- Storyteller: A interactive game show in the style of 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'
- iTales: A concept video to promote iTales—an interactive, mobile sto-

rytelling experience for use on iPods.
- Five short films (one on typography, horror trailer, thriller, black comedy and animation).
- Machinima: A short machinima film.
- Educational aid: An interactive video and accompanying written script for teachers to use with their pupils.
- Soundscape: Pure audio narration of the story with atmospheric sounds.
- Cable Fable: Cable Fable, 'the pathway to storytellers', promotes storytellers and events through an interactive phone booth which rings when it senses someone passing.

Storytelling Attribute focussed (six projects)
(Often through physical media as an installation)
- Interactive Puppetry: Three physical puppets tell the story from their own point of view, voices change depending on which puppet is 'active' which is controlled by touching the mouths of the puppets.
- Emotional Storytelling: A research experiment to explore the role abstract visuals play in remembering stories.
- Face Fable: A physical 3D sculpted face, framed with black fabric, which tells a story through rear projected images.
- Picture This: An installation piece combining audio and a set of socially created photographs inspired by the story.
- Interactive Music Network: A website to share and create music inspired by traditional stories.
- The Cow that Ate the Piper: A set of three animations showing different parts of the story requiring discussion amongst viewers to piece together the whole story.

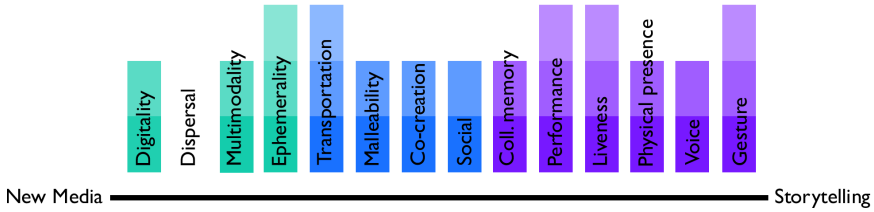
Performance Focussed (three examples)
- Shadow Telling: A performance piece which digitally manipulated the gestures and shadows of a storyteller in real-time.
- Digital Campfire: A performance piece for live storytelling using a physical model of a campfire with teller controlled colours.
- Interactive Storytelling Aid: A soft, rugby sized ball was developed to give the storyteller control of the intensity and type of image project-

ed onto a screen behind them.

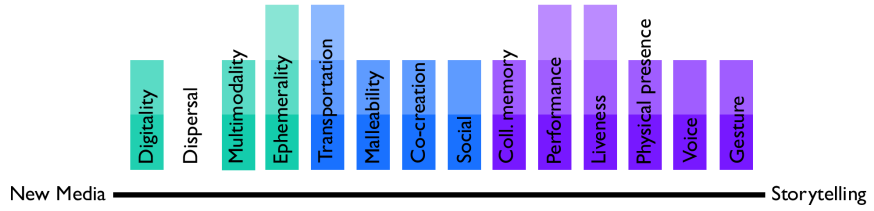
Other (one example)

- Digital Tapestry: A digital, programmed tapestry which slowly moves in a simulated wind.

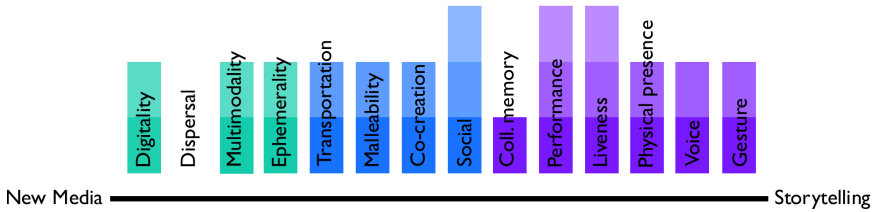
The graph clearly shows that the projects with the most complete spectrum are the *performance focused* ones. These three examples were truly hybrid storytelling-new media experiences, centred around live, traditional storytelling events. The framework shows this focus through the liveness and performance parameters.



Shadow telling spectrum

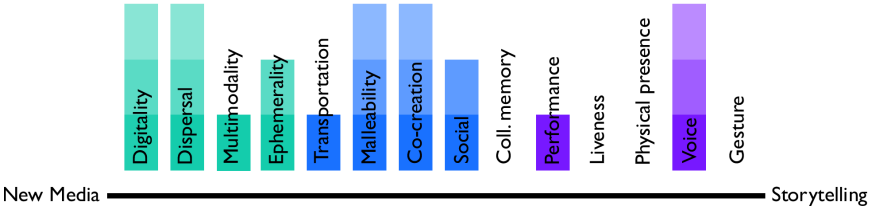


Digital campfire spectrum



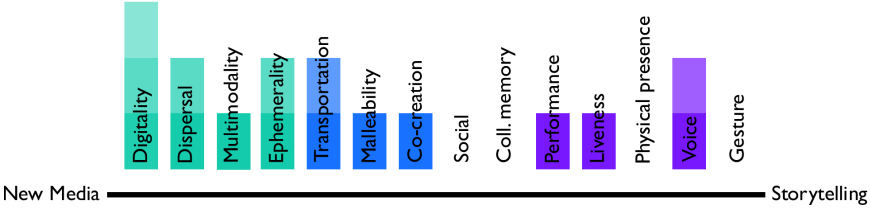
Interactive storytelling aid spectrum

More surprisingly perhaps is that the *storytelling attribute* focussed group does not have the highest amount of storytelling attributes on the graph. This is because these set of projects focused on one or two attributes, so whilst that attribute would be at highest weighting, other attributes received nothing. For example, the *Interactive Music Network* had a high proportion of *voice* but no other significant purely storytelling attributes.

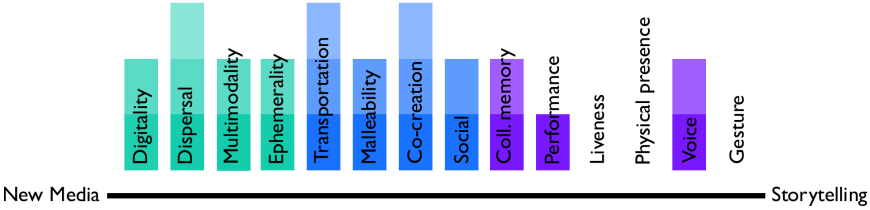


Interactive Music Network spectrum

If we consider the new media column on the graph, we can see it is fairly evenly spread across the project types. All the projects had substantial digital elements to them (this requirement was part of the brief after all). It is notable however that the three highest ranked new media projects (*iTales*, *Picture This* and *Interactive Music Network*) all had *dispersal*, through storing and sharing content across the Internet (at a conceptual level if not in actuality).



iTales spectrum



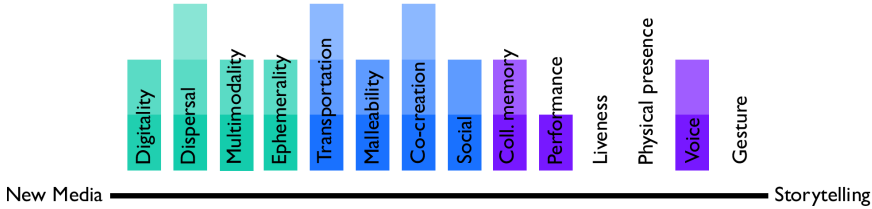
Picture This spectrum

A final note remains to be said upon the hybrid or middle band of the framework, in virtually all instances, a high degree of hybrid qualities is connected with either a similar level of new media or storytelling qualities. This middle band describes the commonalities between new media and storytelling (see Bridge *Developing a Lens for Reflection*), and it therefore follows that it is likely that a new media object will demonstrate either a skew towards either end of the continuum, that is, storytelling or new media. One which successfully utilises the maximum characteristics of either will naturally also include the attributes of the middle band too.

15.2 What can the Lens for Reflection tell us?

The graph described above is all very well for comparing a set of new media objects but it is anticipated that in the main the *Lens for Reflection* would be used for single, or small sets, of new media objects. Therefore, what the completed spectrum tell us? Let us consider two examples from the case study, *Picture This* and *Face Fable*.

As described in chapter 14, *Picture This* was an installation piece presented at the Timeless Tales festival which combined audio and a set of socially created photographs inspired by the story. It was supplemented by a website where photographers could submit images.



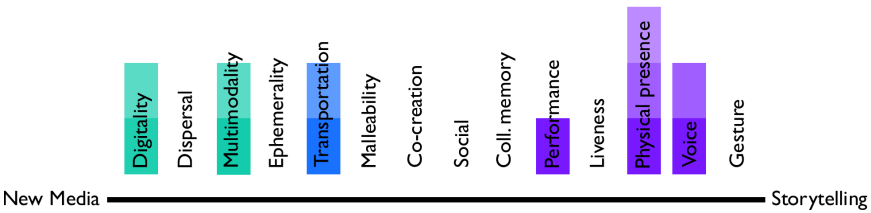
Picture This spectrum

Referring to the *Picture This* spectrum above, we can see that in general the project rates highly, though with a bias towards the new media side. If we were looking at this project and seeking to redevelop or reiterate a new prototype, obvious avenues worth exploring would be *liveness* and *physical presence*. *Liveness* or *uniqueness* of telling could easily be integrated into the online version of the project. For example, the story could be heard with a slideshow (i.e. like digital storytelling), the socially gathered photographs

could either be in a completely random order or a tagged subset (e.g. cow, old woman, barn) to be viewed at key points with the audio.

By comparison, *Face Fable's* spectrum is less complete, with a distinct focus on *physical presence*. (*Face Fable* was a physical 3D sculpted face, framed with black fabric, which told the story through rear projected images.)

Once again, if we were hoping to create a more even spread across the spectrum to incorporate more elements of storytelling and new media, then possible aspects to consider would be to incorporate a sense of liveness (perhaps by recording a few versions of the story which could then be selected at random). Alternatively, the middle area of the spectrum could be enhanced by adopting some co-creativity through allowing viewers / users to record their own stories. This could incorporate *social*, *malleability*, *ephemerality* and *dispersal* and provide a more balanced spectrum.



Face Fable spectrum

15.3 What are the benefits of the Lens for Reflection?

It is easy to understand at a glance the nature of a new media object under observation by examining its completed spectrum. The dual axis of the new media/storytelling x-axis and the graded presence of attributes in y-axis serves to effectively reflect the continuum between storytelling and new media whilst allowing a meaningful 'discrete' quality to creep in to facilitate comparison and ranking. As shown in the above two examples, completed spectrums can be assessed for missing components. Once gaps have been identified, means of addressing them can be explored and then informed judgements made as to whether these attributes should be considered.

In addition the spectrum can be used to validate or categorise the type of new media object. For example, perhaps the aim is to develop a new media

object which focuses on performance and physical presence, whilst minimising dispersal and overt digitality. A completed spectrum could confirm this. The above example of *Picture This* and *Face Fable* assumed that a complete, balanced spectrum is the ideal but this is not necessarily true, depending on the intent of the primary creator (e.g. storyteller or developer). Similarly, the framework could suggest areas or themes to concentrate on for user testing or prototype iterations.

15.4 Closing Thoughts on the Case Study

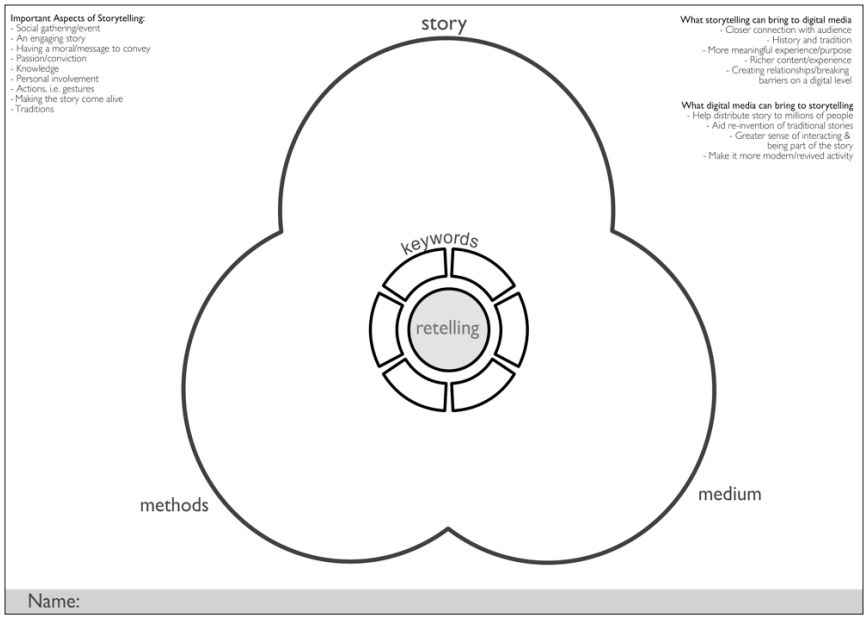
As the previous chapter demonstrated, The ReTelling module produced an incredibly wide range of digital retellings of *Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots.* As mentioned earlier, all comments in this thesis bear no connection to the assessment marks students received. The 'value' of the projects in the context of this thesis is in the concepts they represent rather than how they were physically presented or the technical competence of the finished piece. With regards to the *lens for reflection*, the student projects provided an excellent initial application, representing as they did a whole gamut of spectrums, showing the flexibility of the framework.

The extent of storytelling attributes encompassed in the projects was pleasantly surprising, my early concerns that twenty-three students would produce twenty-three similarly styled videos were unfounded. The students' technical skills were used creatively to produce thoughtfully designed and thought provoking projects. In terms of student reflection, towards the latter end of the module I ran a short reflection workshop, asking students to complete a 'poppy' diagram (see next page).

This worksheet is based on an open Venn diagram, representing the three spheres of story, methods and medium, that is, asking the students how they responded to the story (did they rewrite it, set it in a different timeline etc), how they dealt with the technical challenge (medium) and how they tackled the project (methods). The central element to the diagram is for their project name and six keywords which reflect it. Finally, the notes at the top left and right provide a reminder of the responses they gave to three prompts at an earlier workshop (chapter 13). The aim of this session was twofold, one to encourage students to reflect on their projects so far to help them prepare for their assessment, and two to provide me with a sense

of the project progression and the students thoughts and background on them.

Its success was limited however, as the students did not seem to engage with the idea, one student flatly explaining to me that she hated it, claiming to really not like any of these types of diagrams or exercises. So what was designed to be a mutually helpful exercise was received as a chore (two of the better examples are shown overleaf). This was probably down in large part to the fact that it was getting near the assessments and time was running short—as priorities go, filling in a large piece of paper with reflections on a concept which is still in the building process is no doubt not at the top of the list.



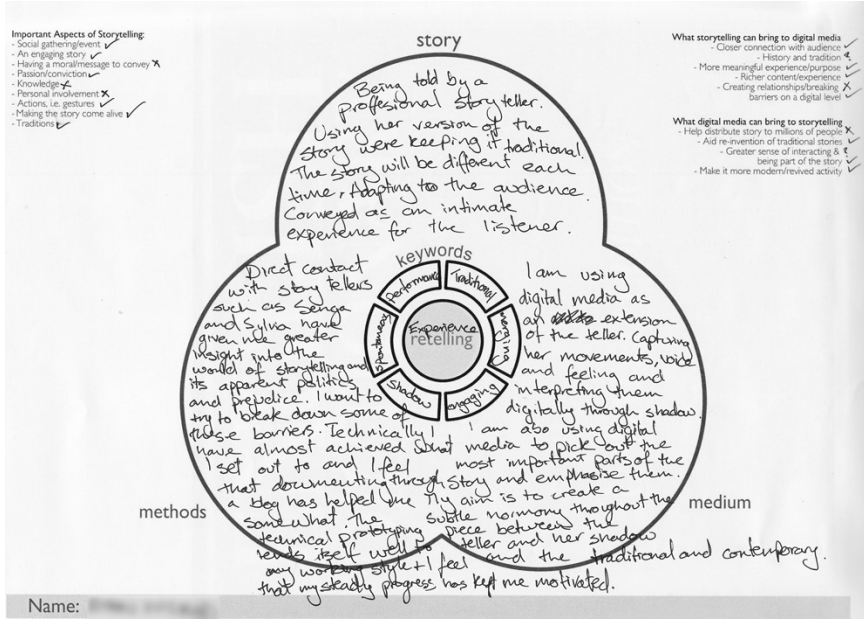
In general, the projects either engaged with the story (e.g. as a short film, or animation) or the medium of storytelling (e.g. digital campfire). The module seemed to give students an increased awareness of storytelling, as evidenced by this blog entry:

I Underestimated Storytelling... posted on 2008-03-24 19:01

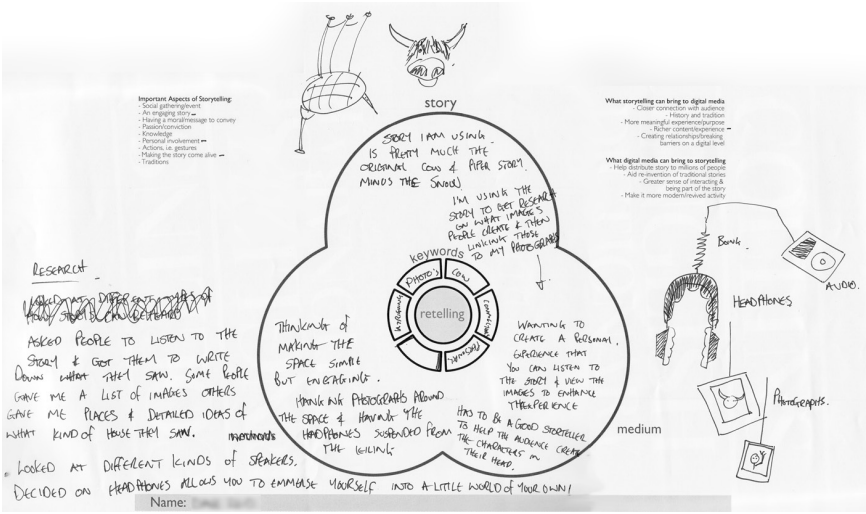
I was in London at the weekend for Easter and it seems this whole brief has made me a good bit more aware of storytelling in it's various forms.

...I was sitting on a District line train from Stepney Green to Westminster when I spotted something amongst the adverts... it was a Chinese Proverb not too dissimilar to those which we were reading in the studio a few weeks ago. I suppose it's something that's always been there but I've just never taken the time to notice. Incidentally, the scheme also includes a massive panda face and caravan on one of the platforms at Gloucester Road station... can't say I've spotted either of those either.

Then roughly an hour later I was on the Strand, famous for musicals and shows. There was one show branding itself as "Modern Day Fairy-Tale" and instantly thought of [student] when she was explaining about the series of modern day fairy tales on tv. The show, "Into The Hoods", is a modern day interpretive street dance adaptation of Stephen Sandheim's "Into the Woods".

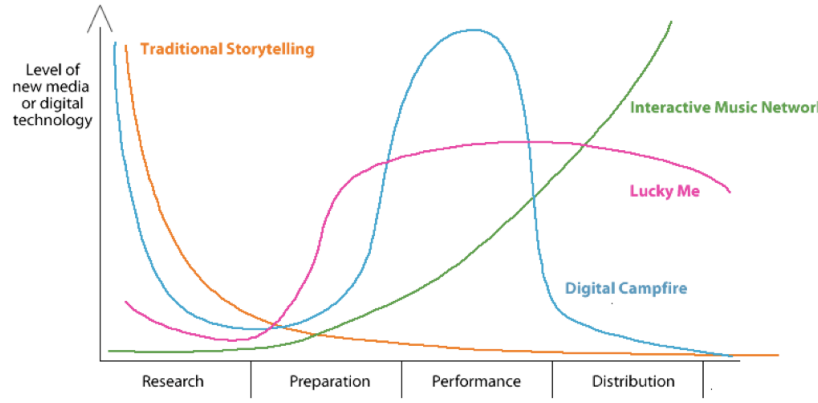


The results presented above show a wide range of methods of retelling the traditional story. At the final festival *Timeless Tales*, I invited several story-



tellers to come along and see the finished projects. In fact, two tellers were already involved in telling stories using the aids (the digital campfire and shadow telling). Reactions were mixed from the tellers, some really appreciated the range and mix of responses, others were put off by the crowds. I confess that I had not anticipated how busy the studio would be in the evening. If I was running a similar project again, I would arrange a private viewing time for storytellers to view and interact with the projects and meet their designers. Discussing the projects with tellers afterwards, it was clear that they had either not understood some of the designs or missed them out altogether as it had been too crowded. Once explained (post-event) the ideas were well received. Storytellers who managed to stick it out at the festival until it was quieter were quite enthralled by some of the ideas, particularly the *Digital Campfire*, *Interactive Puppetry*, and *Picture This*. The puppetry was popular as tellers thought it would be useful for children to explain different points of view and empathy. Picture This was popular as tellers simply enjoyed standing in the space hearing the story and looking at the photographs. Whilst visual imagery was there, it was in a random order, so you had to work to find relevant images for the story section you were listening to. Finally, the campfire was popular largely because they all wanted to have a go changing the colour! It was viewed as a simple, unobtrusive augmentation.

Drawing on this augmentation idea, we can represent the digital campfire using the same graph used in chapter 10.5 *The Four Stages of Storytelling*, plotting level of technology use against the stages.



As the graph shows, the Digital campfire graph differs somewhat from the traditional storytelling distribution. Whilst the initial research and final distribution phase are the same, the performance stage has a high level of technology, and a raised preparation stage indicates a slight learning curve. The digital campfire curve would be similar to the other two performance focused projects (shadow telling and interactive storytelling aid). By comparison, the website based *Interactive Music Network* has a lower research curve, sweeping upwards towards the performance (recording or editing mu-sic) towards the distribution (solely online). The other project represented is *Lucky Me*, a short film, where performance is the most technology intensive stage (filming and editing).

15.5 Applying the Reflection tool to a Wider Field

As the last pages have shown the lens for reflection works well when applied to hybrid new media-storytelling objects. This section places the lens over four new media applications (SecondLife, Twitter, VoiceThread and Capture Wales) which all have narrative capability without being based solely in storytelling domains.

SecondLife

SecondLife is a virtual world online, users have 3D avatars which can be customised with clothes, hair etc. Land and virtual property can be bought and events are held regularly (e.g. parties, art gallery openings, storytelling sessions). SecondLife has been chosen to represent a specific example of a virtual world, where there is a great deal of freedom of control within the environment (objects, and animations can be designed, built, and sold).

Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging application where users can post public Tweets (140 characters maximum). The social aspect of the system occurs when users follow other users and reply to or retweet (forward) messages.

VoiceThread

VoiceThread provides a way to create an audio slideshow (with video capability) which can be annotated with user comments in a range of ways (audio, text, video/webcam, doodles). Essentially it is a type of digital storytelling with some added social networking elements.

Capture Wales

Capture Wales was a BBC digital storytelling project which finished in 2008 but the videos are still available online. As such it is typical of digital storytelling and so will serve well for our purposes here in considering a range of narrative applications.

To generate the spectrum for each application, let us refer to the set of questions provided in the Bridge section. These fourteen questions relate to the fourteen parameters in the spectrum, each answer ranges from 0-3.

Digitality: Does the object have digital components, i.e. is it electronically discrete, modular, and use digital data structures in any way?

SecondLife	3
Twitter	3
VoiceThread	3
Capture Wales	2

All four applications have a high degree of digitality, however Capture Wales has less due to the preparation stage of digital storytelling (sourcing documents, constructing and refining the story—largely through non-technical means).

Dispersal: Does the object distribute itself across either users, computer networks or geographically?

SecondLife	3
Twitter	3
VoiceThread	2
Capture Wales	1

Both SecondLife and Twitter are very dispersed, existing solely through computer networks across the world. VoiceThread is dis-tributed in that is it online, but to a lesser degree, it is all stored in the one site. Capture Wales is was published on BBC Wales and on their website.

Multimodality: Does the object use a range of modes to interact with users? (E.g. sound, visual, tactile, or text, photography, video).

SecondLife	3
Twitter	1
VoiceThread	3
Capture Wales	1

Capture Wales and Twitter only have two modes of content (audio and imagery; and text and browser image display). SecondLife has audio/voice, visual avatars, photographs and video viewers in-world and

text both in the interface and in-world too. VoiceThread is audio and image-based but does incorporate text commenting and video too.

Ephemerality: How permanent is the object and/or its content?

SecondLife	2
Twitter	3
VoiceThread	1
Capture Wales	1

SecondLife events are inherently live but the environment itself has a slower rate of change, buildings and shops (whilst changeable) tend to remain as they are.

Twitter feed changes fast, depending on the number of people you follow it can update several times a second. Older tweets drop to the bottom, losing value.

VoiceThreads can change through comments but the original author clips remain and any change is within those boundaries. Individual Capture Wales stories are fixed, but any new ones on the website are shown first, updating the overall site.

Transportation: How successful is the object in transporting the user or listener? I.e. does it provide an immersive, engaging experience? (N.B. This quality is difficult to quantify)

SecondLife	2
Twitter	1
VoiceThread	1
Capture Wales	1

As noted, this question is difficult to answer. Virtual worlds can be quite immersive, Twitter whilst interesting is not terribly transporting, VoiceThread and Capture Wales are similar.

Malleability: Does the object present itself in such a way as to be easily manipulated by either the primary creator (e.g. storyteller) or by end users?

SecondLife	2
Twitter	2
VoiceThread	2

Capture Wales 1

Excluding Capture Wales, all applications are easily altered, VoiceThread comments can be added simply, Twitter has an open API allowing developers to create third party applications and uses (e.g. Spymaster, TweetDeck). Digital stories are fixed once created, but during the creation process it is easy enough to edit and make changes.

Co-creation: Does the object explore the dynamics of co-creation by allowing the user to create and reuse the object with others?

SecondLife 3
Twitter 2
VoiceThread 1
Capture Wales 0

SecondLife is open, allowing users to create or build objects, these can be copied, given or sold to others at the creator's choosing. Twitter's tweets can be forwarded on, or edited and then forwarded. VoiceThread comments allow co-creation.

Social: Does the object incorporate and encourage social interaction amongst users?

SecondLife 3
Twitter 2
VoiceThread 1
Capture Wales 1

Once again, SecondLife scores highly here, it is essentially a social environment, interacting with other avatars. Twitter is social through searches, replies and finding like minded people to follow. VoiceThread is social through annotations and comments. Capture Wales is social in the creation process.

Collective Memory: Does the object encourage the tacit sharing of stories and knowledge across its members/users?

SecondLife 1
Twitter 2
VoiceThread 1
Capture Wales 1

All applications have some degree of collective memory. Capture Wales documents and shares the stories of others, as does VoiceThread. Twitter has a collective memory as found in the trending topics, the most popularly tweeted phrases.

Performance: Does the object embed a performative element in it for the primary creator or end user?

SecondLife	3
Twitter	1
VoiceThread	1
Capture Wales	2

This parameter can be a little bit difficult to judge, however, SecondLife can be very performance led, e.g. role play environments, where characters are being maintained. Twitter is largely not performance driven as tweets are generally written without much forethought. Digital storytelling is more planned and constructed, i.e. has more performance.

Liveness: Is the object a unique live event?

SecondLife	3
Twitter	2
VoiceThread	1
Capture Wales	0

SecondLife is live, it is like real life in that aspect, conversations are not captured, when logged back in there is no way of tracing them. Twitter is live to an extent but past tweets can be searched (with mixed success). Digital storytelling is not live in any sense. VoiceThreads are not inherently 'live' but can be altered and up-dated, mainly through comments.

Physical Presence: Does the object have or make use of a physical presence (normally of the primary creator, e.g. storyteller)?

SecondLife	2
Twitter	0
VoiceThread	0
Capture Wales	0

SecondLife is the only application which has some sense of a physical presence and this is manifested through a virtual body or avatar.

Voice: Does the object make full use of audio and the power of voice?

SecondLife	2
Twitter	0
VoiceThread	2
Capture Wales	2

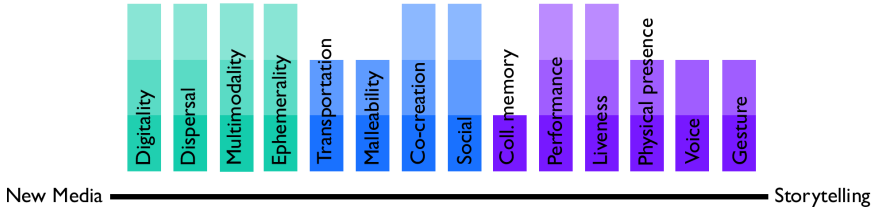
Twitter has no audio feature but the other three applications use voice and audio to communicate.

Gesture: Does the object make use of gesture and/or body language?

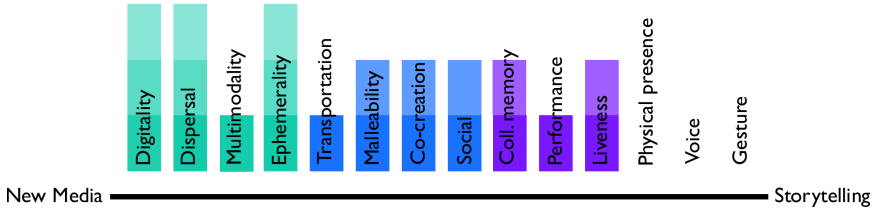
SecondLife	2
Twitter	0
VoiceThread	0
Capture Wales	0

SecondLife avatars use gestures, they can be created bespoke and controlled delicately. The other three applications make no use of gestures.

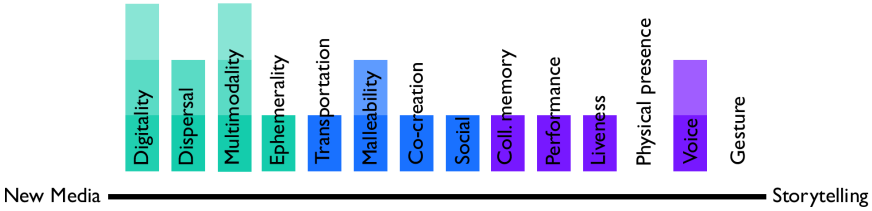
So, having completed the series of questions, the spectrums for the four applications are as follows:



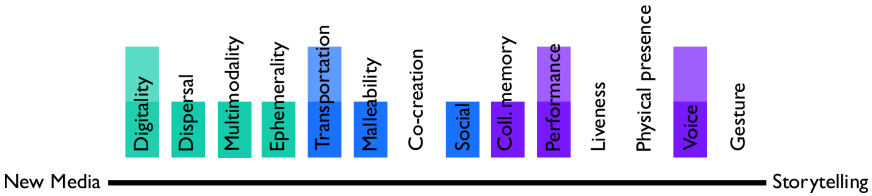
SecondLife spectrum



Twitter spectrum



VoiceThread spectrum



Capture Wales spectrum

It is clear that the Capture Wales and VoiceThread's spectrums are similar, with a greater emphasis on new media parameters for VoiceThread. This correlates with their similarities in reality, they are both essentially audio slideshows, but VoiceThread verges towards social media.

Twitter is firmly towards the new media end of the spectrum, it is not designed, nor claimed to be a storytelling tool. What storytelling does exist has fought to find ways to share narrative (see *Bridge Where Worlds Collide: Technology Mediated Storytelling* for examples).

SecondLife is nearly a complete spectrum, it displays storytelling characteristics in a digital environment. Whilst the hype around SecondLife may have passed, interest in virtual worlds remains (Young, 2010).

15.6 Conclusions

Part III *Creating & Exploring Connections* focused on a case study with design students. The results from this study have shown not only creativity and technical competence, but a grasp of storytelling concepts and has exposed a series of ways in which technology can interact with oral culture without necessarily resorting to screen-based systems.

Several students picked up on key storytelling attributes, such as gesture

or physical presence, and did their best to transpose these qualities into the digital world with greater or lesser success.

In addition, what has emerged from the case study is a positive use of the *Lens for Reflection* tool developed in the previous Bridge section. The reflection tool was used as a framework to overlay and map characteristics of new media and storytelling for each project. It was similarly applied to four commercial, real world applications to show their narrative potential and limitations. Whilst the reflection tool is in its infancy and further evaluation and development is required, these chapters have shown its application and relevance as a discussion tool.

Part IV:
Reflections
and
Conclusions


Willie gave such a terrible blow
on his bagpipes . . .
that they thought the banshee
herself was after them.
The auld couple took to
their heels in fright and
have never been seen
since.

Part I set the scene for the research to follow by examining the wider literature on oral culture and literacy and in storytelling. The methods adopted for the empirical work were discussed, including key issues such as validity, 'going native' and reliability.

Part II explored the world of traditional storytelling in Scotland, describing the culture and ethos of storytelling. It also outlined the key characteristics of storytelling.

The Bridge section considered new media, its scope and its characteristics. Some reflection was offered on the connections between storytelling and new media with specific reference to these sets of characteristics, and a framework for reflection was developed.

Part III detailed a case study situated in the dual worlds of tradition and technology. An overview and background of the case study was presented along with a set of detailed results which made use of the framework developed in the previous Bridge section.

This final section summarises the key research questions and findings of the thesis, and offers reflections on the work presented.

Chapter 16
Conclusions & Contributions

Our relationship with media has been changing dramatically over the last few years. No longer simply content to digest mass produced fodder, we now create, critique and reshape our stories. The supposedly democratising shift from consumer to producer, from the mass one-to-many broadcast media to new media's many-to-many paradigm is accompanied by a freeing up of physical devices towards every increasing mobility and tangibility. No longer constrained to a desktop computer, mobile devices give us the opportunity (should we so desire) to document our lives, telling our stories day by day on the hoof by audio blogging, vlogging and posting updates to any number of social networking sites.

Ong's inspiring term 'Secondary Orality' (see Bridge) conjures up images of a technologized society more redolent of 'primary orality' (or preliterate society) than the literate world it was built on. Whilst this alluring simplification is undoubtedly an exaggeration (discussions on what an oral or literate culture actually is ensures that there is no clear cut answer), this thesis has clearly demonstrated that there *are* significant correlations between oral forms of communication (i.e. traditional storytelling) and new media interactions.

But what is the potential for such research? How can we maximise on these parallels without falling foul of an utopian Secondary Orality simplification? This chapter and the next make some inroads towards answering this, but it remains the case that as our notions of literacy, authenticity and authorship change and fragment around us, reflections on oral storytelling, the most intuitive communication method we possess, could have profound implications on the ways we share culture and strengthen identity.

This research has shown a way to bridge two fields with differing domi-

nant senses, and successfully develop a working relationship between them. The next stage is building on this, and creating meaningful, useful tools which draw on the strengths of both domains. As Illich (1973) eloquently noted,

> People need new tools to work with rather than tools that "work" for them.

16.1 Conclusions

Chapter 1 outlined the main research questions and domains which drove the research. The underlying premise of this thesis is that,

> Despite traditional storytelling culture's resistance to adopt technology, and technology's inability to embrace traditional storytelling, similarities between attributes of storytelling and properties of new media guarantees traditional storytelling's future relevance to both traditional and digital spheres.

In order to either prove or disprove this hypothesis, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the relationship between storytelling and new media?
2. How can connections between storytelling and new media be utilised to meaningfully explore their similarities and relationship to each other?

The answer to question one was tackled from a storytelling perspective, through an in-depth, long term field study of the storytelling community in Scotland, whilst question two was examined from a new media perspective, using a case study of young designers as they responded to a challenge to resample a traditional tale into digital media.

1. What is the relationship between storytelling and new media?

Part II, *The Stories*, investigates storytelling in Scotland, focussing on the Dundee-based Blether Tay-gither storytelling club. The definition of storytelling in this thesis is not simply the mechanics of standing up and telling a story, nor it is limited to the structure and variations in stories, rather it is the culture of storytelling, the *medium* of storytelling.

> The storyteller is clearly the medium of the story, the facilitator of its altered reality; but since in an ideal storytelling event the actual story takes place as much in the group imagination and responses as in the storyteller's words, the entire listening group is the true storytelling medium.
>
> (Sobol, 1999, p. 36)

Therefore, to gain an understanding of what this medium is, an awareness of the cultural context and background is required. *A Journey into the Land of Stories* (chapter 4) describes a typical evening of stories at Blether Tay-gither and sets the scene for subsequent chapters concerned with core aspects of telling (for example the importance of the live dynamic between story, teller and listener found in Chapter 7). However, a key outcome necessary to facilitate later discussion and comparison with new media is a coherent definition of storytelling, and more specifically, a set of bounded characteristics or attributes. Chapter 9, *Attributes of Storytelling,* charts the development of such a definition and its subsequent attributes.

Alluded to throughout Part II is the perception of technology by storytellers, but it is chapter 10, *Tellers and Technology*, which directly addresses the relationship between storytellers and technology. To summarise, despite using computers for story promotion (e.g. raising the awareness of storytelling through flyers and ordering T-shirts on-line, and generating work through websites and emails) storytellers are adverse to using anything more than simple props for their telling. Part of this reticence is due to storytellers' lack of knowledge of the possibilities of technology, but equally, they feel that part of the charm of storytelling is its simplicity—its pared down, human-to-human connection. The introduction of technology would merely complicate this 'eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart' relationship.

2. How can connections between storytelling & new media be utilised to meaning-fully explore their similarities and relationship to each other?

To answer this question, it is of course essential that any connections between storytelling and new media are noted and discussed before attempting to explore and utilise them. We can see this better in the following sub questions;

2.1. What are the points of intersection/connections between storytelling and technology?
2.2. How can storytelling qualities be transposed into the digital realm?
2.3. How can these qualities and connections be explored?

The first sub question was dealt with in the Bridge section, by firstly discussing new media and its definition. A list of new media attributes for use in this thesis was then described through synthesising new media attributes from literature sources. Using the two sets of characteristics from storytelling and new media, connections between them were made and discussed.

The final two sub questions were examined in Part III *Creating & Exploring Connections*, where a case study of Interactive Media Design students worked on a module *The ReTelling*, created to explore the possibility of closer connections with storytelling and new media. Students were introduced to the world of storytelling and asked to reinterpret a tradition tale (*Willie the Piper and the Frozen Boots*, as illustrated throughout the thesis) using digital means. The students quickly identified key elements of storytelling and some of these became the focus of projects (for example *gesture* and *physical presence* of the storyteller). The case study clearly showed that not only are there similarities between new media and storytelling but that qualities conventionally thought solely the province of storytelling could co-exist with digital technology. The success of the final student projects as relates to the range of new media-storytelling at-

tributes was considered through a *Lens for Reflection*, a spectrum of parameters defined and developed in the Bridge section. This reflection tool analysed the projects, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses and offering a consistent way to compare and contrast their qualities.

16.2 Summary of Contributions

As with any interdisciplinary research, part of the challenge lies in situating the work across domain boundaries. This research largely straddles the fields of new media and storytelling, with a toe stretched, Twister-style, into social anthropology. Upon first glance the domain of technology and storytelling seem relatively well populated—digital and virtual storytelling are rapidly becoming established sub-domains of computing in their own right—however the stance taken in this thesis is the polar opposite, coming at the issue of new media and storytelling from a practical grounding in live, traditional storytelling. I am not concerned with plot structures or the creation of autonomous story agents, drawing instead on social anthropology and sociology debates on orality and literacy to provide a backdrop with which to compare the twin worlds of storytelling and new media as we shift from a consumer to producer society—from one-to-many broadcast media to many-to-many communication media. In our dual-domain then, we find uncharted waters, signposted only by the occasional treasure map. This thesis seeks to build a radio mast on a desert island so to speak, to allow others to navigate their way more clearly between the traditional and the digital, to discover that there are not the differences they may at first perceive and to find more routes to connect us.

To summarise then, the main contributions to knowledge this thesis represents are as follows:

1. Methodological approach to developing a study group
2. Mapping of general storytelling attributes
3. Synthesis of new media characteristics
4. Elucidation of connections between storytelling and new media
5. Development of a framework for reflection for new media objects to assess their storytelling qualities & promote discussion

1. Methodological approach to developing a study group

The bulk of the empirical research was with the Dundee storytelling group, Blether Tay-Gither. Data gathering techniques were largely of a conventional ethnographic form, however a novel element to this research was in the fact that Blether Tay-gither did not exist prior to the research. My role as a complete-member researcher was fundamental to group development, through my initial roles of both secretary and treasurer. The group was not dependent on my research per se, but rather on my role as primary organiser for the group. However, I would never have considered taking on this role in the first instance without the guidance of my research interests (nor would I have necessarily discovered storytelling in Scotland without it either) so in that sense, the group's formation and development was reliant on my research. Once started, Blether Tay-gither developed organically and is not in any way dependent on this research; that is, Blether will remain as a legacy of this work, for as long as its members continue to support it.

As mentioned earlier, the success of this '*Grow a Group*' approach was dependent on the enthusiasm and dedication of core group members—researcher drive is not sufficient (without it, the group would simply be a series of focus groups, not an autonomous club). Blether was helped by the overarching support network of storytelling in Scotland, allowing Blether to provide a new focal point for storytelling in East Scotland which was sorely lacking. It would be interesting to discover if this method could work in other contexts.

The advantage of such an approach is the tacit knowledge gained, there is no complex group background history to understand and unpick. My role as researcher was apparent from the start, and through a group process of trial and error we discovered what might and might not work. This gave me a rich sense of the group dynamics and an insight into what research methods would be most appropriate.

Conversely, the disadvantages of this approach is the level of commitment required by both the researcher and group. As a complete-member researcher, I devoted a lot of time and energy into promoting and developing the group, participant observation was on top of this, a feat made more difficult due to playing host for the early group meetings.

For any future researchers seeking to adopt this approach, care must be taken with ethical considerations. From the outset, I made it clear that I was a PhD student investigating contemporary oral cultures, but as chapter 3.6 discusses, researcher intentions were not fully known at the start of the research. Working on the basis presented by Ellis that 'you have to assume everyone you write about will read what you write' (2004, p. 150), informed consent was sought for interviews, and co-authoring and member checking was used in all relevant elements of the thesis. Ethical considerations of informed consent and overt/covert research are common to all types of ethnographic work however (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), so a thoughtful awareness of the issues should be sufficient to guide ethical guidelines in this particular group generation approach.

2. Mapping of general storytelling attributes

Part II examined the Scottish storytelling community, exploring its cultural nuances and beliefs. Through a mix of literature review, personal experience and ethnography, an initial list of storytelling attributes was created. The list went through several iterations thanks to feedback given by the local, national and international storytelling communities (see chapter 9). The final set of characteristics are as follows:

1. Diversity of stories and storytelling styles
2. Collective memory
3. Performance
4. Liveness
5. Physical presence of teller, eye-contact
6. Voice
7. Gesture and body language
8. Engagement of imagination
9. Connection between story, teller and listener (co-creation)
10. Intentional desire by teller and group to share stories
11. Authenticity of the teller

3. Synthesis of new media characteristics

Unlike the list of storytelling attributes, several sets of new media at-

tributes already existed. Despite several parallels between them, they all have slightly different approaches. In order to ensure that all relevant aspects were included from each set, a composite list was developed.

1. *Digitality*: the underlying technological structures which enable new media objects to be easily accessed, manipulated and remoulded.
2. *Multimodality*: the range of modes in which users can interact, impact and experience new media.
3. *Immediacy*: the twin goals of new media to provide such an immersive experience that it renders the medium invisible and to make media so pervasive that its incongruity becomes unnoticeable.
4. *Dispersal*: the distribution of new media objects across networks, accessible media creation tools and the geographical dispersal of increasingly mobile physical devices all enable dispersed production and consumption of new media.
5. *Co-creativity*: the experience and social dynamics of co-creating new media objects with other users as a bricoleur, contributing to revisions through feedback, interacting within and out-with predefined parameters.
6. *Ephemerality*: the transient nature of new media objects, as shown by the finite lifespan of their physical existence (e.g. mobile phones superseded by newer models), current accepted formats (e.g. file types/protocols) and the ever changing, mutable content they embody.

It is anticipated that this updated set of characteristics will be of use to both general new media developers and those interested in the overall Lens for Reflection, i.e. narrative-based new media objects.

4. Elucidation of connections between storytelling and new media

The Bridge section discussed the wider connections between storytelling and new media. Their overlap is quite substantial, spanning a continuum, however a simplified set of parameters were produced, namely;

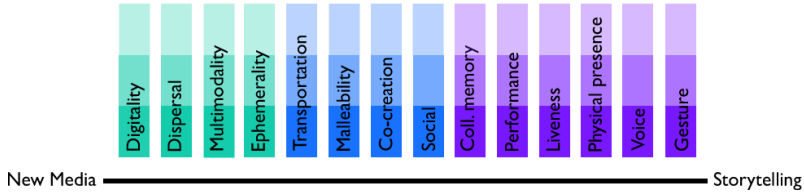
1. *Transportation*: reflecting the joint aim of both new media (through *Immediacy*) and storytelling (through *engagement of Im-*

agination) to *transport* the listener into another space.
2. *Malleability*: the ability of storytelling to adapt stories depending on audience (*liveness*) and stories to mutate over time (*collective memory*), connected with the transient nature of new media objects (*ephemerality*).
3. *Co-creation*: the direct connection between the *co-creativity* of new media and *co-creation* in storytelling (the connection between story, teller and listener).
4. *Social*: the inherent social element of storytelling and the increasingly present social aspect of new media (as demonstrated by social networking sites like Facebook).

5. Development of a framework for reflection of new media objects to assess their storytelling qualities

The characteristics from the first three contributions were combined into a tool for reflection. The *Lens for Reflection* incorporates a visual representation consisting of fourteen parameters extending across a spectrum.

The presence of each parameter is divined by a question with answers ranging from 0-3 (where 0 indicates that parameter is not present at all and 3 that the parameter is completely represented).



The framework was applied to a set of new media objects in a case study in Part III (see chapter 14.2) and also to four new media applications in section 15.5.

Chapter 17
Reflections & Future Work

The exciting thing about research and knowledge is that it often raises as many questions as it answers, and this is especially true in exploratory work. This chapter presents a series of reflections—on the style of the thesis, the methods used, the lens for reflection framework developed, and the future for storytelling and new media. Limitations and strengths of the research are considered and opportunities presented for future work.

17.1 Reflections

A Writing-Story?

> Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.
>
> George Orwell - Why I Write

Laurel Richardson suggests writing a writing-story about the process of writing, bringing in the context, 'tying what can be a lonely and seemingly separative task to the ebbs and flows of your life, your self.' (2000, p. 943) Writing-stories, she tells us, situate the writing the author's life, 'such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties, and personal history.' (ibid) I am not going to reproduce such a story here, but I would like to make some more general references to the type of writing used in this thesis on a personal level.

I have always enjoyed writing on some level, even when it is difficult (when Orwell's 'painful illness' quote above rings the truest). I like the freedom and confidence it affords me, but since leaving school in 1997 (and probably before then too) I have always written in 'academic' writing—the disinterested third-person. I used to enjoy writing that way, I still do in many ways. But at the start of the writing up process in this thesis I found myself really struggling. There I was, surrounded by incredible storytellers weaving vivid tales and I faced the unenviable task of reducing them to static, dry words in print. It was only when I read Carolyn Ellis' *The Ethnographic I* (2004) that I made the decision to experiment with my writing a little. This decision was not taken lightly however, the style of writing used was chosen as it most honestly reflects the environments they represent. Feedback from storytellers has been positive too. The greatest compliment I could receive came from a storyteller who told me they could hear the voices of the other tellers as they read it.

Respect in storytelling is a powerful concept—respect for the stories, for the cultures they represent, for the tellers who have told before and for the tellers and listeners around you as you tell. As I see it, the way I have written shows more respect for the storytelling community than impersonal interview transcripts. The tellers are coparticipants, not 'subjects' or 'informants'. This thesis is characterised by 'the featuring of multiple voices and the repositioning of readers and "subjects" as coparticipants in dialogue' (Sparkes, 2002, p. 210).

Similarly, my self-reflexive journal extracts are there to serve a purpose, not self-indulgent but illustrative. Autoethnography often aims to transform its readers; the aim of my journal extracts is not so lofty, they are merely there to elucidate my journey as a burgeoning storyteller and to show aspects of the storytelling community as I experienced them. Blether Tay-Gither is a unique club within Scotland, with very successful group dynamics and where the group roles have developed organically; the journal attempts to reflects this. Essentially however, it is a personal journey and non-repeatable. The use of 'I' was difficult, initially feeling dangerous and exposed. Academic writing is deceptively easy by comparison, it can be comforting to hide behind complex sentences with multiple sub-claus-

es infused with jargon, but 'no text is free of self-conscious constructions; no text can act as a mirror to the actual.' (Stephen speaking in interview, Banks and Banks, 1998, p. 13)

Consciousness of *methodolatry*, 'the idolatry of method, or a slavish attachment and devotion to method' (Janesick, 2000, p. 390), a multi-faceted approach was used, drawing on a range of data collection methods and documentation as well as a mix of final, layered writing styles. Writing was used as a 'method of inquiry' (Richardson, 2000), the very process of writing and creating informing the reflections and analysis taking place.

Chapter 3 discussed the notions of validity and authenticity, noting that member checking (working with group members to verify and validate accounts of events) is a way to reduce inaccuracies. Autoethnographic texts are subject to criticisms, such as having dubious validity and being fictitious, issues which were also noted and argued against in chapter 3.

> "This may be a good time to talk about accuracy and truth in writing," I say.
>
> "But aren't they the same thing?" asks Jack.
>
> "No," I respond. "The stories Valerie is writing may be accurate in terms of who said what when. But, as Valerie said, they are not truthful, at least not in the sense of truthfully conveying the emotional experience that occurred in the interview."
>
> "Valerie," I say, "you're trying so hard to be accurate or factual that you're losing the heart of the story. I doubt then that these stories will capture readers. As Zinsser says, "[F]idelity to the facts is no free pass to the reader's attention.'"
>
> "That's sure true," says Valerie, looking dejected. "I don't even want to read some of them myself."
>
> "I start with the assumption that language is not transparent, and there's no single standard of truth," I say. "This premise questions the concept of descriptive validity—that researchers are 'not making up or distorting the things they saw and heard.' I would argue that all validity is interpretive and dependent on context and the under-standings we bring to the observation."
>
> (Ellis, 2004, p. 123)

The above quote highlights the difference between accuracy and truth. In this thesis, member checking was used scrupulously to try and address these concerns, ensuring that both accuracy (of events as they occurred) and truthfulness (realistic portrayal of events including contextual cues) was achieved as much as possible. However, on reflection, if the research was to be repeated, a more immersive style of writing would be attempted, namely the complete co-authoring of texts. Co-authors genuinely share the writing process (perhaps through independently writing accounts of an event, before combining and recreating the account into a single cohesive rendering) rather than simply commenting and inputting into early drafts.

Overall then, the aim was to create a messy, writerly text, relinquishing some con-trol as author and passing it to the reader—a co-creation, just like storytelling.

> …authors of autoethnographies seek to produce writerly rather than readerly texts…Wilson (1998) notes, "The writerly text is less predictable. It calls on the reader to engage with the text to more deliberately bring to the reading his or her experience as a way of filling the gaps in the text."
>
> (Sparkes, 2002, p. 220)

Going 'Native'

The oft cited fear of participant observation is that over time, the researcher becomes fully embedded in the community, to the detriment of objective observation and research. This phenomenon is known as 'going native.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 110) It is characterised by a sense of 'over-rapport', and in some cases prevents observation and data collection in 'favour of the joys of participation' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). However, as Adler notes, this epistemology edged towards the notion that 'the value of fieldwork lies not in how the researchers maintained distance from the data, but rather in how close they came to the phenomena.' (1990) Adler describes three types of membership roles in ethnographic settings, peripheral, active, and complete; all distinct from the conventional marginal role traditionally advocated. Unsurprisingly, peripheral researchers do

not assume 'functional roles within the group', active members participate in core group activities and generally assume functional roles, by comparison complete membership:

> entails the greatest commitment on the part of the researcher. Beyond merely participating, complete-member researchers immerse themselves fully in the group as "natives." They and their subjects relate to each other as status equals, sharing a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals. Inevitably, they come closest of all re-searchers to approximating the emotional stance of the people they study.
>
> (Adler, 1990, p. 98)

In the context of the storytelling group, I definitely made a transition from outsider to group member, as a complete-member researcher. In addition I made a series of contacts out with the Dundee based group into the wider Scottish storytelling community. However these contacts were largely generated as a result of my role as organiser rather than teller. Research questions and observation tended to occur only after introduction in my 'official' capacity, although I was in no way secretive about my research. The extent of my involvement with the community was when I was asked to be interviewed by a storyteller for some research to gauge the state of the storytelling community in Scotland.

Validity, Wolcott argues, is a complex topic to address definitively, only becoming 'more likely' to be true at best. Quoting Pelto & Pelto, Wolcott tells us,

> In their field research anthropologists have invested much effort to achieve validity, for we generally assume that a long-term stay in a community facilitates the differentiation of what is valid from what is not, and the assembling of contextual supporting information to buttress claims to validity.
>
> (Wolcott, 1995, p. 169)

Using this definition, the approach adopted with Blether Tay-gither ensured that 'contextual supporting information' was in nearly all cases already known by the researcher, as together the group generated its own

history and contextual information. In addition, three years was spent as part of the group during the research. Finally, in an additional bid to validate findings, crystallization was attempted (see section 3.4), in as much as approach (through collection of mixed media data), as through collating and attempting to reinterpret different participants viewpoints—working with members as participants, not 'informants' or 'subjects'. Validation and reliability have been achieved as much as possible by closely working with study groups (i.e. students and storytellers) and presenting research results to them for reflection and feedback (see chapter 3).

I have a personal sense of understanding and identification with some of the views of storytellers in terms of the need and power of storytelling. This has come through directly experiencing stories and participating in sharing them. It has also thrown into new relief my paradoxical tendency to regard technology both as a superfluous, dehumanising daemon and as a fascinating, increasingly social phenomenon with incredible possibilities—if created and approached in a thoughtful manner.

Van Maanen describes this occurrence:

> In print, the research is presented as occasionally boring, sometimes exciting, but virtually always self-transforming as the fieldworker comes to regard an initially strange and unfamiliar place and people in increasingly familiar and confident ways. (1988, p. 2)

Part of the interest in this research is the novel way it has been undertaken in the creation of a fledgling group, developing over two years to become a more cohesive unit with new and existing relationships between members created. It is a much a support network for tellers as it is a storytelling club. This need for support in the wider community has been identified and there are now movements to creating groups devoted specifically to supporting tellers in Scotland. The development of Blether Tay-gither is such that we are now one of the more successful clubs in Scotland and are often verbally cited as a case study by the Scottish Storytelling Centre and our remit is extending all the time. We now run at least two events a year with other storytelling clubs, trying to build connections between us all, to encourage and promote storytelling in general.

Throughout my analysis of traditional storytelling in Scotland, awareness of the dangers of 'over-rapport' and 'going native' have always been present. However, my 'going native' experience as a complete-member researcher was not negative but incredibly positive. It has allowed me to immerse myself completely in the culture, and experience the world from a different point of view, becoming close to and part of the storytelling phenomenon.

Whilst the 'grow a group' approach worked very well for me, on reflection it would have been useful to have in addition, monitored the evolving group dynamics in order to chart the group development process. This would have been interesting from a sociological perspective, providing data which could then be compared between research groups, potentially giving rise to a set of guidelines which could formally determine the 'grow a group' methodology.

In the case of Blether Tay-gither there were no real personality clashes, however for other groups, maintaining a record of group interactions may pre-empt any shifts in balance, preventing the group from either fragmenting or stagnating. This emphasises the researcher role in such a methodology, that is, involved in managing the study group as well as observing interactions. If more than one researcher was present then responsibility for these roles could be shared.

Framework

The *Lens for Reflection* tool developed in the Bridge section is useful in gauging the degree of skew towards either new media or storytelling and identifying opportunities for development in either domain. However, it is designed as an aid for reflection and further thinking, it is not prescriptive or constraining. This may be deemed an abstract tool, but the open-ended nature of the framework is deliberate—created so as not to impose a set range of 'implications for design', a common outcome for ethnographic-style computing research projects (Dourish, 2006). The ReTelling case study described in Part III amply demonstrated the scope of new media-storytelling objects, if a prescriptive set of guidelines were applied to such a case study the end results would undoubtedly be more constrained.

An awkward but necessary aspect of the reflection tool spectrum however is the line drawn between analogue continuum and discrete numerical representation. In order to make meaningful analysis and comparison with the spectrum some aspect of discreteness must be used, however it is important to note that the fourteen parameter scales are sliding, and several of the parameters themselves are interconnected (for example, *ephemerality* and *malleability*). The visual representation chosen was selected as a best fit diagram. Similarly, the questions provided for each parameter would benefit from a series of evaluations, along with the wider framework to improve the consistency and ease of use.

17.2 Future Work

As noted at the opening of this chapter, exploratory work opens up questions, some of which have been recognised in the previous Reflections section. This section investigates the opportunities for further research opened up by this thesis. They can be considered in the following areas;

1. Bridging domains
2. Literature review—member researchers, grow your own group, develop structured approach 'participant-action research'
3. Application of *Lens for Reflection* as part of design process
4. Development of a toolset for storytellers
5. The Re-remediation of storytelling
6. Implications of research for multi-literacies & mixed-media
7. Integrated projects
8. Building on *Lens for Reflection* to develop projects with geographically isolated practitioners

1. Bridging Domains

This research bridged the domains of traditional storytelling and new media by active researcher participation in both. Although my background is in technology, through working with storytellers and becoming part of (and creating) the local group, my viewpoint regarding technology and telling shifted, ending up somewhere between my initial love for technol-

ogy and the tellers' professed reticence. Future research could investigate this bridging principle. I was a physical bridge between the two worlds, and the case study described in Part III formed another bridge, reaching out to both sides to work together, the tellers ostensibly getting involved to help me, and the students because it was part of their course (although neither were under any obligation to be part of the study). It would be interesting to see if the reverse could happen, for instance, how could the creation of a new media or virtual community bridge the real world? What implications would that have for identity and authenticity?

2. Grow Your Own Group

The long term field study method has been cited in this thesis as novel due to the researcher's involvement in the set up and development of the group. Angrosino and Pérez's reference to the 'street corner society' set up was 'a "society" only because an ethnographer chose to treat that "nexus of interaction" as a site.' (See chapter 3.) However, there must be similar situations documented elsewhere. A future suggested piece of work therefore, is a detailed study on researcher roles in the inception, definition and use of study groups.

3. Application of Lens for Reflection in Design Process

This thesis has charted the development of the *Lens for Reflection* tool, building up on a thorough understanding of storytelling and new media to generate a set of parameters to assess the composition of new media objects. So far, the framework has been applied to completed projects, however its scope and true power may lie in its application to early stage design ideas and prototypes. For example, an 'ideal' spectrum may be decided upon at the start of the design process. Conceptual ideas could then be ranked against this ideal. Iterative prototypes and associated testing could focus on specific parameters or segments of the spectrum. The spectrum may not be sufficient to deal with all the issues arising from such cases, and so perhaps an updated, expanded version would need to be developed.

In addition, evaluation by a range of stakeholders to assess the ease of use and notational clarity of the framework should be undertaken, along with

its application on a larger set of real-world scenarios. It is anticipated that such research would provide a more robust, improved lens for reflection.

4. Development of a toolset for storytellers

Part II explored the context of storytelling in Scotland and suggested that technology is not necessary for storytelling. Whilst this is true, tellers do use technology (see chapter 10) but largely in the promotion of their craft. With the advent of increasingly mobile devices and the proliferation of social networking sites showing no sign of abating, there remains an opportunity to help technology wary storytellers make the best, most efficient use of new media to promote themselves and the role of storytelling as a whole.

For a technology to be appealing it would need to be reliable, stable and ideally tangible. For people used to working with hands-on tangible, craft materials, or simply from visual imagination, there would have to be a substantial incentive to swap to a digital alternative.

In addition to promotional aids, as we have seen, many storytellers use technology in the early stages of the storytelling process (mainly the *research* and *preparation* stages in the four stages of storytelling diagram in 10.5) and it could certainly be a goal to incorporate these elements of technology use into a single digital tool, which say, could enable the searching, storage and management of story sources, ability to create bare bone structures of tales, record and playback features, background cultural information on stories and reference information (e.g. photographs of objects, animals or locations).

Of course, surrounding this development could be further evaluation of the *lens for reflection* assessing its use as applied to the two storytelling zones of live telling and promotion.

5. Re-remediation of Storytelling—closing the circle

The Bridge section discussed the remediation of media, that is, the content of one media is influenced by its predecessor. So, new media is a remediation of visual culture, which is a remediation of print culture which in turn remediates the spoken word. As the discussions, case study and

framework have shown, the connections between the spoken word (or storytelling in this instance) and new media are substantial, far more than the links between the twice removed printed word. Following this linking chain of remediation to its logical conclusion then results in an incomplete circle of media, as show in the diagram below. We can force the loop closed, which once more, strengthens the suggestion that there is a lot in common between new media and storytelling. The direction of this connection is complex however. Our discussion on page 244 (Bridge diagram) claimed that the final arrow between storytelling and new media should be unidirectional and this claim is repeated here. However this analogy and diagram could easily be explored in more depth. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to continue this argument here.

6. Implications of research for multi-literacies & mixed-media

The research presented in this thesis is firmly focused on storytelling in Scotland. That is, on an oral tradition in a literate culture, in a technological culture. Future research projects could include exploring the validation of the findings encapsulated in the lens for reflection (the characteristics of storytelling and new media). Are the characteristics generalised enough to encapsulate other forms of orality? How would it cope for use in a variety of cultural and literacy settings? Would a new set of questions be required for parameters, or would the interpretation of results differ?

7. Integrated Projects

As mentioned, the research presented bridges two fields, and the way that this was addressed was through long-term empirical study and a case study drawing on the ethnographic work and connections. The case study served to provide a new way of looking at storytelling (for the design students) and technology (for the tellers). An avenue for potential fruitful research is to develop more of these integrated projects, perhaps an art installation bridging the physical or tangible, storytelling elements and technology. Such a project would be used to challenge perceptions of each field, but would need to be created by a mixed team of artists, technologists and storytellers, to provide representation from each area. (This approach of

creating integrated projects could obviously be applied to other fields than storytelling and new media.) A key aim of such projects would be to facilitate and open up discussion between the groups, hopefully sparking off additional projects.

8. Build on framework to develop projects with oral folklore practitioners to strengthen geographic disparities

Whilst the storytelling community in Scotland is thriving, as discussed in detail in Part II, there remains logistic and geographic issues which prevent practitioners from meeting up as often as they would like, and as would benefit their practice. Professional storytelling in Scotland is a largely peripatetic job; social interaction with other tellers is limited unless you attend the clubs (which are based in cities).

There is therefore a potential application for connecting storytellers and similar professionals electronically. Such a venture must provide real value and address the needs of tellers. The Dundee group acts only partly as way to share folktales, it also provides informal support and peer mentoring. This dynamic is missing for geographically isolated storytellers.

A suggestion for future research is to take the framework and apply it to the early design process, developing a social, mentoring application with storytellers, an online community which can be accessed remotely. It could be that more novel approaches to technology are appropriate and should be considered rather than simply adopting a standard visually dominated solution.

Epilogue: When will I b$e a storyteller?

I can hear the birds starting to sing outside. Dawn approaches. I peer briefly through the curtains and a greyish light fills the room. Sighing, I turn back to my laptop. 'Almost done,' I think, scrunching my shoulders in a futile effort to try and shift the almost permanent ache.

As I scroll down the pages I catch glimpses of photographs and memories of storytelling events flood my mind. I smile as I see Blether tellers huddled, cold, around a video camera when we shot our first YouTube clip. When I spot the lamp-lit window of the Unicorn ship, shivers run up my spine, a remnant of the magical evening of story and song. And as I espy the great, steaming nostrils of Willie's cow, the bulk of the cow's body virtually radiates heat through the glowing screen in front of me.

Although this PhD has been challenging it has had its fair share of good points, and storytelling and the people I've met along the way must rank amongst the highest. But even after all this time I can't think of myself as a storyteller. No-one can tell me when this will happen, it is something I must know myself. As many folk have told me and as I've found to be true, the only way you can learn storytelling is by telling stories. The only way you can know storytelling is by experiencing it live. I've done my best in these pages – trying to recreate aspects and elements of the storytelling community as I know and experience it – but it can at best be but a pale reflection.

As I type, I look forward to returning to Twitter. It's been my outlet whilst writing up, but as I write these words my number of posted tweets sits at 1,999 and has done for some days. For whatever strange, silly reason, I can't bring myself to write my two thousandth tweet without something momentous to say. Submitting my thesis seems appropriate enough. My thoughts on new media and technology have been challenged over the past three years, but computing and technology has been a part of me for longer than my discovery of live storytelling. I like to think that both the new media and storytelling sides of me will continue to live together in harmony. Reading literature on technology and anti-technology it feels like there is often no middle ground. I am that middle ground, embracing both storytelling and technology.

The pure notes of Allegri's Miserere wash over me, and I realise I am done. A sense of peace and hope finally steals over me.

Perhaps one day I will proudly say, 'My name is Debbie, I am a technologist. I am a Storyteller.'

And so Willie now has a great house, all that he needs and a cow who gives him plenty of milk and butter.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Wilson's Performance Continuum

conversation _____ cultural performance
low intensity_____ high intensity
informal _____formal
subconscious_____ conscious
low risk_____ high risk
low rewards_____high rewards

'This model is based upon the assumption that all acts of storytelling are also acts of performance in the sense that 'performance' is understood as a mode of communication to which are attached certain rules and conventions that determine the behaviour of the teller and listener.

…The Performance Continuum assumes that these performance conventions apply to every act of storytelling, whether it is an anecdote, casually told in conversation in the pub or on the bus (represented on the extreme left of the Continuum), or whether it is a story told by a professional teller on stage at a high-profile festival to an audience of hundreds (represented on the extreme right of the Continuum). The difference be-tween the two is ultimately the level of intensity at which the performance mode is operating.' pp.9

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Appendix B
Interview Transcripts

The following pages contain sections from interviews with storytellers. Transcripts are not reproduced in their entirety due to the sheer amount of data (over 80,000 words). As will be apparent, the transcripts are fairly complete, although may contain grammatical and typographic errors. Key participant gestures are noted (e.g. laughter, pointing), however as the interviews were videotaped these directions are minimal. Time codes are included occasionally to aid future searching through the footage. Pauses and conversational nuances are not transcribed, again partly due to the archival video footage, but also because there was never any intention in applying discourse analysis to the transcripts.

The interviews were transcribed in full and then coded using HyperRESEARCH. The list of codes used is provided here, along with several examples of coded segments of interviews.

Interview sample 1

INTERVIEWER: How did you get into storytelling?

PARTICIPANT: Ok, I think that having been a teacher that one way or another I used storytelling. A lot of reading of books and things but most teachers use storytelling even if it's just memories, or something off the top of your head to demonstrate. So that was there in place, and then I lived in Papua New Guinea for approximately 8 years and it was then up in the highlands of New Guinea where they have the great big sing-sing once a year. And that is a gathering of all the clans even the warring clans will come together and you, I mean, I can remember the sensation of this, um, they come with what you would have to say are like battalions of their clan members and they would be dressed, in full regalia, all the feathers, all the weapons, and em, they would sing and they would chant and there were these competitions which the um, the Australians, had said, well you know, lets get together and celebrate and you know, we will award prizes for the people who have preserved their culture in their dress and of course they are people who um, their art is living art, so it is the face painting. The people in the highlands don't have a culture of carving and making artefacts. Um, that is because they were primarily, at one point they were nomadic, but not to the extent of the Australian aborigine, but they were people where their re-sources had to be put to use, life was hard, so em, at this gathering, 10 thousand armed warriors, and you know, there was singing and chanting and all the valleys were ringing with it. But there was something that was more magnificent than that.

Dotted about, on the hillsides, on the slopes, and I had to find out what this was about. With one man, [pause] and many people. And um, in some cases, it looked like he was haranguing the crowd but he wasn't, he was a storyteller. They were all storytellers. And they were was this sort of sub-competition going on, and the big man of the festival was the storyteller who could hold the biggest crowd for the longest time. And I think that walking around, and, they were speaking in their own language, which nobody was using Pidgin English, and I couldn't speak their many languages, but it was watching the faces of the people. And these crowds were adults all the way down to babies and [mums?] and that was when I actually came face to face with the power of storytelling. And it wasn't necessarily then that I took up storytelling but it was an image that never left me. So, em, when I

left New Guinea I came over here and I'm not Scottish, I was London born. And, I was working in a hotel over in the north of Scotland but at school and right through my adult studies, my passion had been history.

INTERVIEWER: Is that what you taught?

PARTICIPANT: No, I taught children, primary school. And my passion, personal passion, had been history, and the other thing had been folktales and fairytales. Right throughout my life. And that comprised my, pretty well, my reading material. Um, so, I em, naturally then working up north, became interested in the history and you can't become interested in the history without the songs and the ballads and the stories. And so, very quietly for that number of years, I was taking all this onboard and not doing anything with it, except I was running a pub, the hotel. So, of course, there was a lot of storytelling then. But not the kind that em, I do now! And em, so, I came down to Edinburgh, we bought this house. Our work in progress, nearly 13 years on, and not quite, but anyway. Um, and I worked in the book trade. I don't know about storytelling then, I'd come home with yarns, sitting round the table and I'd be talking about oh, this happened on the bus, and that happened and, my daughter would sit at the end of the table and go [mimes sewing] I was embroidering the truth.

And I, got into my writing while I was in the book trade, and of course, that brought me back into research, and then after the first 3 books which were baking, cooking books, I was asked what I would like to do. And that was the life of Robert Burns for children, then I was asked by another publisher what I would like to do, and so I said what I really want to do is the history of Scotland for children, and Scottish folk and fairytales. So, I wasn't telling, but I was, you know, right back to where I belong, and then after these books were published and I was out and about in schools as an author, talking about my work, talking about the books, and I would start these sessions by simply saying so before there were books and before there were computers, and before there were TVs, and before there was radio - how did stories get around? So I always started from the aural. And we would talk about books, whatever I was asked to discuss with the class. But then the children would - I would say which story would you like? And I would have these 6 fairytales lined up and they would say, oh this one, the [??Water fight/witch of fife??] And I would just say fine, ok, and I'd leave the book there, and I'd tell the story. So

that in a nutshell is probably the start of my storytelling as we understand it. The kind of storytelling that you're researching.

[PAUSE IN TAPE - GOES TO LET DOG OUT 00:07:43.000]

INTERVIEWER: So are you writing a book, are you writing at the moment?

PARTICIPANT: I am working on story boxes, which is a huge project, it's been a work in progress again, first of all they asked me to, you might want to know about this later on, its a big project, um, the storytelling centre asked me to devise a couple of story boxes, this would be to help children with their listening and aural skills. And in the end, I did 7 of them.

INTERVIEWER: What is a storybox?

PARTICIPANT: A story box is a great big box, physical, and um, it's filled with toys and objects, so I spent a whole summer trawling charity shops, and then in it, we have all the hints and tips for the teachers, so, it relies on them telling, being the role model and telling stories, so its all the information there for them and then there are, step-by-step games that the children can play that take no time at all, they take no time for the teacher, because technically she already knows what that game is, she just - its an aide memoire, oh right, I can do that, I never thought of doing that, this way, sort of thing. And the children don't actually realise that they are practising their listening and their aural skills, it's a game. And it has shocked a lot of teachers because we piloted this in many, many schools, and its shocked a lot of teachers, even with the primary sevens. The minute they had something in their hands and being given permission to be a child again, the layers all peeled away. So, its really, really very powerful, and um, so, I spent a lot of time then after the summer the boxes were out, in the winter months they were piloted, and then I took feedback from the teachers, and re-jigged things, simplified some stories, so the cards are all the games and activities. Most boxes contain two types of stories, so you can have [porquoi stories??] and trickster tales. A magic and mystery one might have um, nursery fairytales and the longer fairy tales or fairytales for example that revolve around the breaking of a promise. So, in the Scottish stories and the magic and mystery boxes which I prefer headed up to the end of the school, those boxes really revolve around the motifs in storytell-

ing and the structure of a fairytale, although that is examined in the other boxes and there's an animal fun one, and an around the world and a sea and shore and there's a nursery box or infant box, we call it an infant box now. Was a nursery box it's now an infant box. Its um, the nursery box we piloted in Leith, and em, the er, she has had that out in all the cluster schools and had a huge impact going out a lot of children of course who use English as a second language um and they don't share our culture. And she's been able to introduce them to our culture through this, the use of this box, um, but of course the impact is also in terms of the child's life skills. You know, cooperation, and um, having consideration for other people, being part of an audience, behaving appropriately in this way. All kinds of things have come out of it. Which I knew would happen.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that's the stories themselves, the kind of storytelling environment?

PARTICIPANT: The whole culture of storytelling that has brought this about. You know I've got about a 14 page document, I never, pfff, I've got a 14 page document that talks about this kind of thing. Storytelling in the curriculum, and the impact it can have, so that seems to be my field now. I've come back to teaching.

INTERVIEWER: So do you tell stories as much?

PARTICIPANT: Oh yeah absolutely!

INTERVIEWER: What do you go into schools and tell them? Who do you tell them to?

PARTICIPANT: I tell them to - anyway, did you check my website?

INTERVIEWER: I did have a quick look at it.

PARTICIPANT: That's it, that's fine. Yes, no, I have told stories in the most extraordinary places, yes, I tell stories where ever I can. I've just come back from Helsinki. I was representing Scotland and the UK for world language day.

INTERVIEWER: And what did that involve?

PARTICIPANT: That involved em, emailing the 5 other storytellers and trying to find a common thread between us and deciding on what were going to do because we were having a storytelling marathon. In a, where were we, the campie, which is a multi-storey shopping centre and we were parked right by the entrance to the metro. Not easy. Um, so this actually is very relevant to yours. Here we were, spread across several countries, and we had to prepare to work together for four hours on one day. And how did we do it? We emailed.

INTERVIEWER: And did it work well?

PARTICIPANT: Well, we settled on the stories, we talked about how we thought it would go. We got to Helsinki the afternoon previous and storytellers never know how to have a short meeting. Our meeting lasted for 5 hours. And most of it was wasted telling stories. But we did, we got settled on how we would em, tell these stories, the relay stories especially. Because the idea was for people to hear a story that they knew but it was told in six different languages.

INTERVIEWER: How did that work then? Did you each tell a section of it or did you repeat?

PARTICIPANT: Right, so we chose stories that would work, so we did em, the great big enormous turnip. It needs 6 people. Um, so we did things like that. Three little pigs, um we gave each other breaks so 3 little pigs we only needed 4 people meant 2 people could get away for a break and then we also told stories in our own language as well. But we tried to tell stories that we thought, the people primarily Finnish, em, would understand.

INTERVIEWER: So do you speak Finnish? Did someone translate for you, a bit then, or did they, you just told it?

PARTICIPANT: No, I don't at all. I spoke in Scots, very bad Scots. They didn't know that. Um, and English. And then um, but what was interesting there. Was when we were waiting for two of the storytellers for the meeting, em, Boregar from Iceland stood up and said 'och, he said, 'im going to tell you a story'

We'd only just met. And so he stood up and he started to tell this story in Icelan-

dic. So this, we're sitting there going [grimaces], and then I go [quizzical, then sits forward in chair] and then I hear 'moo' that's ok. Right, some cows, doesn't matter what language. And then a 'coo' so I thought right ok, well there's lots of stories with coos in them, but there was just something. And I started to try and listen to the rhythm of the language and the pattern of the words and im watching him and he was a person unlike me who is minimalist with gesture so it was very difficult to pick what was going on. But im listening and im watching and then he goes [moves head down a bit] and I thought, I think I know this story. So he went on to the end and one little gesture that gave it away and confirmed that I knew the story and it was [puts closed fists on top of one another, in circular motion] [00:16:53] that's all he did [does motion again] and I knew the story. So when he was finished I said, 'I know that story' and the others were dead impressed. And they said, what, what, tell us! Tell us! And so, I'd only heard the story once before, and um, it came from Skye. And er, so I said does the story come from Skye? And is it two giants? And he said yep. And I'll tell you the story. And I did. [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: So what did the gesture at the end mean?

PARTICIPANT: Well, the big giant has to get through the mountain and he takes a drill.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's amazing.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So, they kind of translate, even without knowing the language

PARTICIPANT: Because we have gesture. And it's interesting, you know, because the little giant's talking to the big giant and the big giant's talking to the little giant

INTERVIEWER: So it's not just about the voice then? It's about the whole sort of characterisation?

PARTICIPANT: No. And when I'm storytelling to um, children with disabilities or children with poor attention or very young children who need to be in the

story, then you use gesture - you use actions. [Makes house over head symbol] so you have 3 little pigs. And they built themselves a house, it had a roof, it had a floor, it had a window, it had a door. [Makes gestures for roof, floor, window and door] 00:18:18.000

And so they're in the story with you and it helps increase their listening skills and puts them in the story.

Interview sample 2

INTERVIEWER: How do you go about remembering stories then the process from getting - I mean where do you get them?

PARTICIPANT: Erm, I think right a story's got to work for me you know and if it works for me in a first, in a first hearing or in a first reading, perhaps that you pick something up in a book, or an incident, you know, in a newspaper, er, you-I think in a first reading or hearing, if I don't see it, if it, doesn't do something for me, you know, in terms of seeing it unpack, erm, then I probably wouldn't work on it anyway. Er, so, I mean, that first encounter with the story, er, whether it be a read or whether it be hearing, it's vital, it's absolutely crucial if I've got it in that first hearing then it's - it's more or less there. I mean I probably need to sometimes, that, one tell- you know, you start off telling a story and you realise three quarters of the way through that you've missed out a key part and it's unpacking, you know, [laughs] 'oh I forgot to tell you! [Points] something very important to this story, you know, dah dah dah dah.' But hey - did that matter? Probably not. You know It's a natural thing, you know, you-you-you come back to that, and mebbe, mebbe that's something about it being quite - about storytelling CAN be quite a loose art, it - yeh, there are certain traditions, that you know if you tell me a story, er, from the tradition, I must tell that story with the exact same words, the exact same rhythm, the exact same er, you know, kind of, emphasis on each word you know as I heard from, you know, you. There are traditions like that, er, I-I don't work in that. The story is much looser, more fluid thing er, having said that, you know, it, - the craft is there. It's worthwhile building on all the senses you know, cos the senses link into the memory and the experience of the story you know, the, of - of scent and noise and smell and evoking these things. And some, some clever language can be useful in that too. Cos language is a powerful thing and, and can

be a real, er, can-can-can add to a story but too much cleverness in language too er can be you know a detractor I think some of the, er, the traditional storytellers like stories to be quite spare. They don't like them to be over embellished because you know, that's because cleverness rather than the story.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of stories do you tell, what kind of circumstances do you tell them in? [00:10:45.000]

PARTICIPANT: I suppose in my work as a minister I'm a local storyteller. Er, you know and I enjoy sharing stories, even a story in - with someone in their home, erm, and that can be just for the fun of it, erm, you know, for example we were doing some-thing about inter-generational stuff er and I'd a wee story that I - that I just told lots of places, in the old folks home, er, in, er erm in the day care centre in the old folks home, er, in the school, er, you know, ah with somebody in their home, er and in church in a Sunday. So that story did the rounds for that week, er, because you know it was something that I was exploring. And in fact by telling it er it developed because in telling that story and getting reaction, that rapport thing, with different people in different situations, by the time it came to the Sunday it had actually probably grown er, and my relationship with that story had developed from simply 'oh here's a nice story' to 'here's something I've actually worked with and shared with people' and mebbe even other folk have taken that and gone and told it to other folk - if they've liked it too, cos that's very much part of what you hope it's about.

It's not - a thing that I - you know, it's a bit like a good joke. A good story or a poke of sweets, you know, you pass them round, erm, you know, from that point of view, it's not a precious thing - hopefully.

INTERVIEWER: And what kind of stories do you tell?

PARTICIPANT: Erm, different stories, from jokes to erm, traditional tales, I'm very, very fond of Jack stories and traditional Scots stories. I think they have clearly lasted the length of time and they've been passed down because they contain within them erm, you know, nuggets that are, you know, about life and wisdom for life, er, I love world stories bec- and telling world stories I think is a tremendous thing to do because it just simply helps people appreciate other cultures, erm,

and that's tremendously important, you know, that-that-that we're not just er you know kind of Glaswegians or Edinburghers but we're actually you know folk who live in a big world, a world full of stories. Er so I like a lot of world stories. I also like er stories from life, er, you know, cos you're always looking to er, t-t-t-stories you pick up in the papers or stories you hear or even stories that folk tell you about themselves. And I suppose being you know, being a church of Scotland minister preaching each week, I don't preach each week, so I'm a storyteller and out of the stories there's a bit of, maybe a bit of teaching but not in a lumping way - like here's a story and here's what it means, you know, you would tend to mebbe scatter er the service with it, pepper the service with different stories from little anecdotes to maybe a bigger story to a bible story er, and within that there might be some - some form of critique or-or-or teaching er, mebbe from - from erm, a different point of view or-or-or a little bit of analysis er, not here's a story and here's what it means, that's to destroy er the power of the value of the story. I think anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm, hmm. And you think storytelling and storymaking is still relevant to today's society?

PARTICIPANT: Relevant? Erm, well I yeh, I think there's something quite inter-est-ing. Erm, I was reading just an analysis of erm, of what is sacred, what - sacred places and sacred spaces, Ann Morrissey is an academic from-from who works er in the kind of urban church culture and one of the things that she - one of the seven er, tablets of stone she almost set out in a community er was the sense erm of appreciativeness and generosity in life. And I think she contrasted, you know, a lot of TV humour and a lot of the stand up comic stuff that we get, now that's a big big market, is stand up comedy, the fringe here in Edinburgh I've never been to a stand up comedy show in Edinburgh but it's nearly half the Fringe is stand-up comedy. But if you go to Glasgow there's comedy clubs and all the rest of it. The emphasis tends to be er, in quite a negative, I think from what I've experi-enced a little bit of stand up comedy that I've gotten, quite a negative, and and and er, what's the right word, I'm struggling for the right word - but you know it's not generous anyway about life. It tends to be a pretty negative critique. And erm, fairly universally so, and what Ann Morrissey was suggesting is that er, re-ally what is sacred in life is valuing that which is lovely and beautiful erm, and and and quite precious and seeing that and telling it. So the telling is the story isn't it. Er, that's not to say that everything is rose-tinted spectacles, because you know, a

lot of good telling can actually have a bit of laughing at yourself within, you know, you can actually turn stories on yourself or reflect on our kind of humanity and the fact that we're you know, that we're far from er, from what we'd like to be but still generous storytelling can have a good level of honesty but,

INTERVIEWER: D'you mean in the stories themselves or in the process of telling?

PARTICIPANT: Both, both. Instead of - instead of demeaning people, instead of taking folk down, er, good stories - for example, I'm looking at three communities in north Edinburgh just now and wondering if we can do a community mapping. It'd be fantastic to do that community mapping in a way that looked at our community with, what is beautiful here, what is lovely here? What is really - you know, what do - what do we need not to miss in this commu-what is missed by everyone and we can see if we take time to mention it as being a lovely thing er, and and you know, there's a sense in which that's a vital thing in life that, that perhaps we're losing in modern life by our cynical negative er kind of critique and humour tends and-and-and I think a mebbe, a mebbe, mebbe there's lots of stand up comedies that are incredibly generous about life er, [laughs] but certainly in my experience has been of storytelling and the world of storytelling that-that-that it's generous, that it's warm, it's building folk up rather than er clawing the feet from under folk to try and-and-and demolish or - or erm, I mean, I suppose it's a wee bit like, you know, erm, looking at, looking at the way that who'd be a politician- I mean, nobody's going to say what - you know, in particularly the sarcasm in in cartoons, and so, you know, if you're like Ming Campbell, you know kind of over 60 then you're a geriatric you know and er, there's nothing nice said about the man. And the whole critique through, erm, through cartoons and through the politic- political commentary actually it's a farce cos he's nothing you know- And-and-and I think after he resigned, I'm not a- a liberal democrat by the way, but after the man re-signed, [laughs] er I think everybody began to think, what have we done. And I sup-pose you take that and you put that in all of life, and I think what story - I think what storytelling can do is it can have that generosity of spirit that- that's so needed to build people up. Erm, If you look in the culture of-of-of a school for example, and of the culture of a company, erm I think people are now beginning to realise that in building up a good company or a good school, a good organisation, good institution of any sort you actually need to, you need to value people,

you need to actually bring out that which is good, that which is - even the crazy learning points of a company or an institution where there is a wee bit of laughing at yourself and turning it back and-and-and a critique that's not necessarily just all 'we're all fantastic' er, but that could be done in a way that's not er stinging and-and-and you know, and sarcastic er but it can be - and so I think storytelling, the world of storytelling I think is about erm, wisdom's a big thing in it all, you know, where is wisdom, where is love? Where is generosity? And I think stories help us to point that up and to find that in modern life-

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it's being used in schools and businesses like you were saying? Do you think there's a lack of it?

PARTICIPANT: A wee bit, a wee bit. Yeah yeah. I think it's beginning. I think people are beginning to appreciate that that - that you know, that's important. The same Ann Morrissey that I mentioned has a lovely lovely phrase, and she's talking from a theological point of view I suppose, 'story-rich people'. Er, and I love that phrase, be-cause there's a sense in which you know I was I work in disadvantaged communities, where folk in these communities would actually probably have a negative story of themselves, and I think that certainly in Glasgow over a period of - of-of over 20 years what I was trying to do particularly was to work with a lot of creative input through arts and through community events to try and help people change that story. Er. To be a - a good story about themselves er about their place and what they've achieved and about their character and what's special about them. Cos if you don't tell the story, it's in telling the story that you actually realise it. It's a strange thing. The field of appreciative inquiry which you're your probably familiar with, which has been a big thing thats-thats grown throughout university, er, 20 years ago in the states, is that, story sharing, you go and you ask about a place, what is good here, what is - what is wonderful here about a particular facet you might be looking at. It might be a company, it might be a community, it might be a church, and then you develop that and you tell that story. And in telling that story, erm, there's an appreciation of value. It doesn't just appreciate 'oh that's good', but it actually appreciates in gaining value be-cause it becomes part of the story. If we forget about our story, if we don't tell our story, then our story - we don't live our story, we might be living a more negative story but not appreciating that part of our story isn't actually being told. And if it isn't being told then it doesn't have a power to drive us forward and to be part of the agenda that actually

is about transformation and about bringing, so, storytelling and story sharing is, I believe, very, very important.

Interview sample 3

INTERVIEWER: I wonder if I could ask you as the first question - how did you get started in storytelling - how did you get involved?

PARTICIPANT: Um, well, I was working, I mean I think it's like hard to know where you start storytelling isn't it, cos when you, once you do for it a while you realise you've probably even been doing it for years, you know, forever kind of thing. Erm, I mean I was always very talkative at school which was a big problem. And erm, didn't like school and erm, then in social work you know there's a lot of storytelling involved in that, you know. I qualified in 1986 and worked a lot with children so had to work erm you know, say in a case conference given a family history orally or going to court and being a witness which is, it's all using the same skills in a way, except you're not trying to be entertaining [laughs] I suppose, or funny, usually.

And erm, then I worked a lot with children who were in care, and did a lot of work with them, trying to build up their life story and sometimes working with children who were very very quiet or quite shy, depressed you know. So finding ways of bringing out their story has interested me for years and then, erm, but I never used - consciously used - traditional stories as a tool in that. So I - I suppose when I started telling traditional stories consciously erm, I would have been - that would have been about 1999. And that was when I was working for the young carers project in Edinburgh and I was doing a lot of individual work and group work and one of the bits of group work that I did, erm, I was asked to do a joint piece of work for the project in Craigmillar which is quite a deprived area of Edinburgh. There was a project there who were wanting to work with girls who had mothers who had drug or alcohol problems and they felt they didn't really have the experience of working with, with kids in that position, whereas from the young carers project that - they would have been classed as young carers, for us.

So, I worked on that group and erm, it went really well and the group it was decided the group would continue ahm- but the worker had to change so then the

worker be-came [name here], she's now [name], don't know if you've come across her?

INTERVIEWER: I've heard the name.

PARTICIPANT: Right, so ehm, [name] and I started working on this group together, and she said, 'I don't know if you'd fancy it but you know, I've been socialising with storytellers and I'm really interested in some of these stories and how, how they might come into my work, so, d'you fancy giving a go?'

So, we worked with Little Red Riding Hood and erm, even though these girls were P6, you know, 10. Erm, it really, it really worked well as a vehicle for within group work and for them getting to express themselves and work together and you know, us sort of work on the group dynamics and that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you do it? Did you mean you told it or did you get them to work on the story?

PARTICIPANT: We ehm, we did both. Told it and then got them to, erm, we brought in dressing up clothes and we got them to sort of retell it but dressing up as well just them let play with it really. I don't think we were too directive from what I remember. Erm, Just really let them play around with it.

And erm, I remember something else they wanted to do was, that was when the Jerry Springer show had just come out, and they wanted to do the Jerry Minger show. [Smiles]

And they wanted to - to, th-the session to be about drugs, and so they said 'right, so we've got to have like all' and they just came up with all these people that would be on a Jerry Springer show. Like, the parent of somebody who's got a drug problem, the child, the-the drug-the baddie drug dealer, the sort of reformed drug user and [laughs] each took these characters and it was quite funny. And one of them had to be Jerry Minger and we had to get them a microphone and. So, erm, then from there I erm, was working, you know, we just used it a bit I would say, and then I started working with a whole class which was something that we some-

times did if there was a really difficult class that a teacher was struggling with, we'd go in and work alongside the teacher for mebbe a term.

So this class had, you know, had been aroun-you know, was known to the project, were now P5 and erm, basically there was a lot of Craigmillar getting demolished at that time so there was quite a feeling of unsettled, you know, a lot of kids were having to leave their home and go and stay somewhere temporarily til their new house was built and erm, you know, there was a lot of loss and change going on. So we said we would work on that, and myself and another project worker who was a teacher went in and started trying to work - well they'd had a lot of changes of teachers as well and the teacher they now had was quite new to them and she was a newly qualified. And she was just, oh God, they were just climbing the walls, you know and erm, we started doing some stuff around loss and change and they just, they couldn't cope with it. And erm, you know there just wasn't enough safety for them in that class to look at any-thing scary. So erm, we went back to the team and sort of said, you know, looked through this class list and I remember there was 24 kids in the class and when we went through them name by name there was 18 that we knew of definitely had sss- you know, quite severe trauma or loss going on in their families or their extended families erm, and erm, so we just thought we were really going to have to take a much gentler approach with this class. So we decided to try, I thought I'd try telling them a traditional story. So I told them erm, a traditional story of Duncan Williamson's and erm, they just calmed down completely. It was amazing. It's the first time I think we'd got them all to sort of sit down and calm down and just look their age cos they were all, especially some of the boys, they were really trying to look like wee hard men you know. So it was very moving and very powerful and I just thought, mmm, there's definitely a lot in this.

So em, we worked with them twice a week for 2 terms and er, we had to keep coming up with stories and learning new ones to go back and tell each week. Em, so that was a great experience really because I was working in this team where we were very close team, very supportive, you know, I'd say about at least 5 of us out of the team of about 8 were really interested in storytelling. So you could you know people were always coming in going 'oh I just told this story and it worked really well' you know, or 'I've got a story to tell next week, can I just practise it on every-

body like at lunchtime' or something, you know it really was very erm, stimulating and supportive and although none of us, you know – [name] had the most experience really but the rest of us er, didn't have massive experience but we just you know, having a go with it really. And erm I was asked to write a paper recently on mentoring, on being mentored. And erm, you know, I have been, I have had some mentoring from [name], from near Aberdeen which is near where I'm from. But really, when I thought about it, that period in that team was like a great mentoring experience but it was almost like peer mentoring, just between all of us erm, and it was, so I was very lucky to have that sort of really intense experience right at my beginning.

So, within, by 2000 erm, [name] was saying 'You should go in the directory, you know' so in 2000 I went into the directory which sort of nowadays when I see people having to really [laughs] struggle to get into the directory it's funny. But back then there was-nae many people in it you know, now there's a lot more so erm, I went into the directory and that was October 2000 I did my first freelance work I think.

INTERVIEWER: As a storyteller?

PARTICIPANT: Mmmm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: So where do you - you still do that obviously, the storytelling by it-self?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I mean I do a whole mix of stuff now. I do erm, because when I worked in social work I'd done some training there, given some training around communicating with children and child sexual abuse and you know different things that I was kind of specialising in. So, erm, I got into training for storytelling quite quickly really again, because there probably weren't that many people doing it. But I had the training skills d'you know and then I'd learnt the storytelling skills quite quickly so, erm, and I had a particular slant, I suppose coming from the social work background. So I do a lot of training really erm, and I do work, like I'm speak-like I was speaking about earlier where it's kind of using the storytelling just as one of the tools to engage with kids and inspire them and get them to work as a group or a class towards some sort of a goal. Erm, or to work on issues

like their self-esteem and self-confidence. But I also do things like just go into a nursery and do an hour's storytelling, you know, as a one-off. Cos that's sometimes your bread and butter stuff you know.

But erm, yeah there's a whole range of different things come up. I mean I did a piece of work for NHS in Glasgow recently where they wanted to work with a group of women who'd been through the psychiatric system and they wanted to consult with them about what they thought helped and what didn't help and what role stigma played so they decided to do it differently and I went in as a storyteller and kind of group consultant, but using storytelling as a way of engaging with them and getting them to tell their story.

HyperRESEARCH Codes Used

acting
altering tales
America influence
anecdotal telling
applied storytelling
appropriating technology
attraction to storytelling
believability of stories
believing in stories
books
buzz of telling
characters
children
clubs
comedy
communication
community
confidence
connections between tech and telling
creativity
culture
definition of telling
education
Example of story in interview
family storytelling
flexibility of stories
future of telling
gender split of storytellers
generosity
gesture
getting work
how they got into storytelling
human need for stories
imagination
independence/loner/storyteller
interactivity of storytelling
landscape
language
learning stories
listening
liveness of telling
love for stories
love of stories
media and storytelling
memory
mentoring
music
nervous
old storytellers
older people - telling to
oral culture
ownership of stories
performance telling
personal aspects of storytelling
physical presence of teller
power of storytelling
props
reading stories
relevance of storytelling
respect
Scottish Storytelling Forum
sharing stories
simplicity of telling
social appeal of storytelling
solitary existence of tellers
sources for stories
spontaneous stories
story themes
storytelling for children
storytelling training
storytelling traitssuccessful storytelling
teaching or morals
technology
technology aiding storytel-ling
television
theatre
traditional storytelling
traveller
types of stories
visual
voice
without books
world stories
writing

A total of 85 codes were used to tag the interview transcripts. An open coding method was used, ensuring that all sections of the transcripts were tagged and related to their content. Codes were quite abstract and high level, thereby the text they encapsulated was often a full paragraph, illustrating the concept contained in the code. One of the main reasons for adopting such an approach was due to my familiarity with the subject area through in-depth participant observation.

Coded Examples

buzz of telling

…took my story into er, the festival and told it and it went over amazingly. I was actually really nervous and didn't know how it was going to go, and it took about 45 minutes to an hour to tell the story [enanna??] so I jumped in at the deep end. And I thought, it'll be adults that'll want to sit and listen to this and it ended up being that there was a row of children sitting right in the front row. it was outside, we had the carving outside, and we had em, lit by fire, it was at night and all these people are sit-ting and all the children are sitting in front of me and I thought they'll be off in 15minutes. and they sat for the whole thing, completely just, never took their eyes off me. and I was blown away by it and one of them got up at the end and he came over to me and he said, 'you know, that's the best story I've ever heard'. and I was like wow. and I felt really good about it and it felt really natural, once I got going and got past my nerves I really kind of got into the flow of it and I thought I really want to pursue this as an art form and see what I can do with it.

liveness of telling

in storytelling the, the live immediacy is still a very very powerful and important shaper, not exclusively, you know, there's lots of other ways to tell a story but I, I still think its very powerful and useful and that's because its grounded in the basic relationships and communication skills that go on mattering and will always matter, you know, erm,

liveness of telling

You know they've forgotten a bit and thought, oh gosh, I meant to say or oh, I hadn't - didn't tell you but, and you think oh thank goodness. But the thing is that's your story for that day and it doesn't matter if you can work round the bit you've forgotten or, then - ok that's your version for that day and that's it. It's not set in stone. You know, there's, you can expand it or contract it as the occasion may be and that's one of the joys of it. If you know that they're getting, you're losing them, with that particular story. You can see that they're starting to wander or children are getting a wee bit fidgety do something to either bring them back, make a noise, jump up and that sudden movement gets them hooked in again or, just try to wind it up as soon as possible. And other times, especially with adults if you see that they're drawing in, you can add more and add more and build it up and build it up and take it to the climax. Yeah. So. It's a thing for the day.

liveness of telling

You know, its more just, I like thinking on your feet. And seeing what way the story takes you. And I think in that respect there's a benefit in the fact that you just don't know where the story's going to go, you know. Whereas when if you've learnt it from a book you know how its going to end. Whereas, and they kind of, the people in the audience might know it. But the spontaneous one, you just have no idea what's going to happen you don't know where its going to go, you don't know who's going to be in it. Em, so in that respect you kind of, particularly with kids, you find that they really get that, because its the kind of, its the suspending belief even more.

liveness of telling

I think the wonderful thing about storytelling is that the story never stay - never dies. It lives, because you're telling it as a live art form that, you know, you're not bound by the same words every time, you're not bound by the - it's got it's own dynamic force somehow, so that, depending on the environment, depending on the er chemistry be-tween you and the group of people you're telling to it will vary a bit and you know something might

pop into your head to develop the story just a wee bit just on the spur of the moment and you don't know why that's happened but it's maybe something - a clue that you've been given in an almost - well it will be - a subconscious way by the people who are listening to you and so you know it's an exciting process and you never get sick of the stories when you tell them - I used to get very tired of reading the same stories to my children when they were young. 'Aw not this one again' you know But I never feel like that with the telling of a story.

confidence

Just later on. My brother, wasn't, he was a football addict. He didn't want to sit and listen to my stories, you know, but later on, when I had my own children, I told them stories, you know, em, yes I used storytelling quite a lot with my own children, cos I had 5 of them! So it was quite a lot of years I was at home looking after them! [Laughs] my children. But yeah, I did tell them stories. But it was just something I did naturally. I didn't see myself as a storyteller. Until somebody actually told me, you know you're good at that. And then I began to see myself as a storyteller.

Appendix C
The Re-Telling Module Guide

Stories are the raw material of life.

MODULE IM32001 – “THE RE-TELLING”

Studying interactive media design inevitably involves a great deal of time acquiring technical and visual design skills. However as many industry surveys have revealed the real gap in the IMD industries is in regard to what we might call ‘content skills’. Audiences, users, customers (people) can only be dazzled by new technology for so long before they start demanding a richer experience. For most people, rich entertainment experiences rest on one simple feature – an engaging story. This module offers you an opportunity to explore, perhaps for the first time, your own story telling skills.

Of course storytelling has been around for a very long time, and traditional storytelling (as in a performance, a telling, of a story by a storyteller with an audience) is still widely practiced in many places – including Scotland. This module will explore digital storytelling by exploring the boundaries between digital storytelling and traditional storytelling. Over the course of the semester you will take part in storytelling sessions and workshops, consider the relationships between storytelling and games, and develop your own version of a traditional story. The whole thing will culminate in a festival of digital and traditional storytelling, undertaken in traditional ‘hootenanny’ style!

During the process you will investigate the latest trends in interactive entertainment, explore the role of narrative and play in our society, and develop an awareness of the debates around storytelling. But most importantly, this module gives you an opportunity to explore and develop your own skills in that most fundamental, enduring and universal of human entertainment forms: storytelling.

Aims

- Develop an understanding of key storytelling forms
- Foster awareness of the historical, social and cultural aspects of entertainment and play
- Provide key skills for choosing appropriate platforms, formats and contents
- Develop awareness of the latest trends and developments (technical, business and design) in the interactive entertainment business
- Develop an awareness of the ethical debates and issues current in regard to interactive entertainment.

IMPORTANT NOTE

This is a 30 credit module. This means that this module represents 50% of your whole programme for this semester (CMT and AC are 15 credit modules). You should therefore spend 50% of your time this semester on this module.

SESSION 2007/8 STUDIO PLAN

WEEK	TUESDAY (10-1 & 2-5 unless stated otherwise)	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1	NO MORNING SESSION 2-5: CLASS MEETING		
2	NO MORNING SESSION 1-5 IN STUDIO: TELLING TALES PROJECT INTRO 7-9: EVENING STORYTELLING SESSION (VENUE TBC)	10-1 AND 2-5: STORYTELLING WORKSHOP WITH GUEST TUTOR.	10-1 AND 2-5: STORYTELLING WORKSHOP WITH GUEST TUTOR.
3	NO STUDIO: PREP FOR MINI-PROJECT		
4	MINI-PROJECT: "ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE" – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STORYTELLERS AND THEIR AUDIENCES.		
5	MAIN PROJECT DELIVERABLE 1: INTERIM CRITS		
6	READING WEEK – NO STUDIO		

WEEK	TUESDAY (10-1 & 2-5 unless stated otherwise)	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
7	GUEST WORKSHOP ON GAMING AND STORYTELLING		
8	INDIVIDUAL SUPERVISION		
9	NO STUDIO: PREP FOR PEER REVIEW		
10	PROGRESS PRESENTATIONS AND PEER REVIEW		
11	INDIVIDUAL SUPERVISION		
	EASTER HOLIDAYS		
12	FINAL REHEARSALS		
13	MAIN PROJECT DELIVERABLE 2 (FINAL PRESENTATIONS AND BLOG) AND FESTIVAL – DATES TBC		

2007-08 ASSESSMENT BRIEF

Learning Outcomes This Brief Meets

- Design, build, document and test an interactive entertainment experience.
- Demonstrate a significant level of initiative, self-motivation and organisational and professional (including ethical) skills
- Critically evaluate the latest trends and developments in interactive entertainment from an experience and ethical point of view.
- Explain the social, historical and cultural aspects of a particular interactive entertainment form and genre

Overview

You are to reinterpret a traditional story in interactive media form. Beyond that it is your responsibility to develop the rest of the brief. This is an individual project, although of course we strongly encourage you to work together in terms of assisting with solving technical problems, offering criticism, reviews, etc. Detailed deliverable instructions are provided below, however in summary you will:

1. develop a project plan and initial concept pitch and visualisation: PRESENTATION IN WEEK 5

2. create and maintain an ongoing project blog in Interact tracing the development of your thinking and ideas, and trapping the details of the research you conduct (both 'desk' and with users): FINAL SUBMISSION WEEK 13 (AFTER EASTER)

3. present a digital re-telling of a traditional story (in a form you will negotiate with the module leader): FINAL SUBMISSION WEEK 13 (AFTER EASTER)

This project represents 100% of your grade for the module – and is an INDIVIDUAL project

Deliverables

D1 – A project plan and initial pitch/visualisation

This should comprise the following elements:

- A gantt chart project plan detailing key tasks, when you will undertake them, key milestones/deliverables, and any task dependencies. You should use GanttProject (an application running on the Macs in your studio) to prepare this. When you have created you project plan use GanttProject to export as a PDF for submission.
    - The filename should be in the form yoursurname_yourinitial_gantt.pdf (e.g. "bloggs_joe_gantt.pdf)
- One side of A4 'concept pitch' text containing an outline storytelling pitch: how will you tell the story you have been given in terms of digital media and in terms of the final live presentation of your piece. This should include brief notes on what media and platform(s) you will use, notes on form and genre (if appropriate), a summary of intended delivery platform(s) and a target audience description. This should be delivered in PDF file format and also as a short (3 minute) interim crit presentation in studio on the due date.
    - The filename should be in the form yoursurname_yourinitial_pitch.pdf (e.g. "bloggs_joe_pitch.pdf)
- One representative image (can be a sketch, photograph, diagram) that captures the essence of your proposed concept. This should be provided as a 300dpi JPEG suitable for print use, and should be finished to a high standard.
    - The filename should be in the form yoursurname_yourinitial_image.jpg (e.g. "bloggs_joe_image.jpg)

Submission instruction: You should upload your three files to your Interact space AND attach the keyword im32001d1 (case sensitive). Note failure to follow these instructions exactly will result in the loss of one gradepoint!

Due date: Tuesday 12th February 2008

This deliverable is worth 25% of your final grade.

D2 – The Re-Telling

You will be given a traditional story to reinterpret in the media/platform of your choice. The only constraints are: your final piece should contain some digital media and it should be suitable for a 'live presentation'. It may include mixed media and also may have a final presentation that mixes 'live performance' with digital media if you choose.

Your final submission will comprise:

- A presentation (in front of an audience) of your re-telling.

- The presentation will be in a form you decide is suitable, but should be suitable for a general audience and should last no less than 2 minutes and no longer than 10 minutes.

- Your interact blog recording the development of your concept/deliverables and your research and thoughts about storytelling. There should be at least one entry per week and these should also contain an element of critical evaluation of your progress and finished work.

Submission instruction:

Presentations will be videotaped. After presentation, digital media used should be submitted on DVD with a presentation case cover that contains a list of all contents (filenames), instructions for use and your name and Matric Number.

Due date: Week 13 (i.e. week beginning May 1st) exact date and times to be confirmed.

This deliverable is worth 75% of your final grade.

Marking Guidelines

Mark	Band	Type	Description
1st	A	Excellent	An excellent level of attainment, demonstrating a first-class understanding of and exceptional response to the project requirements. Problem analysis was rigorous and incisive. Research was in-depth and original, indicating a variety of sources integrated into a coherent account. A clear understanding of contextual awareness is evident. Idea exploration is highly creative and thorough, often breaking new ground. Consistently applies given methods to the solution of problems and evaluation of own ideas. Design realisation is exemplary, remaining aligned yet surpassing requirements of the brief. Communication is sophisticated and skilful. Presentation is polished. Project process and approach is comprehensive and carried out in a professional manner. Regular self-critical evaluation and reflection.
2.1	B	Very Good	A good level of attainment, demonstrating a fine understanding of and well balanced response to, the project requirements. Problem analysis and research are sound. Evidence of reading beyond taught material and ability to integrate and organise information. Idea exploration is thorough without necessarily breaking new ground, though on occasion may. Evidence of ability to apply given methods to the solution of problems and evaluation of own ideas. Design realisation is solid, with conclusions reached standing up to closer scrutiny. Communication is effective and appropriate variation of techniques apparent. Project process and approach is clearly planned and managed in a timely manner. Self-critical evaluation is evident.
2.2	C	Good	A competent level of attainment that demonstrates an understanding of, and reasonable response to, the project requirements. Problem analysis and research is adequate but not rigorous, with occasional basic errors. Idea exploration and design realisation are good but could have been developed further. Work may contain small omissions that detract from effective communication of final solution. Project process and approach are passable but would have benefited from better planning. Little self-critical evaluation or reflection.
3rd	D	Satisfactory	A minimally competent level of attainment demonstrating an understanding of, but rudimentary response to, the project requirements. Problem analysis and research is cursory. Idea exploration is narrow; ideas proposed are obvious or have clearly been done before. Some of the significant conclusions reached or design statements made, are questionable. Communication is perfunctory. Project process and approach are not well planned. Lack of effort is apparent in some areas.
MF	MF	Marginal	A borderline fail or referral, evidencing some basic understanding of the various elements of the project requirements but with insufficient research and analysis to support many of the conclusions reached or design statements made. Work is superficial and may contain major errors or omissions that detract from communication of ideas. Lack of effort is apparent in the majority of the submission. Not all deliverables handed in or submission deadline missed.
F	F	Unsatisfactory	An outright fail. Limited response to the project requirements. Major errors or omissions through lack of comprehension or effort. Submission may have been partial and/or late.

IM32001 Reading Guide

Specific reading requirements will be communicated during sessions, and it is your responsibility to ensure that you are aware of all reading required to complete the module. In general terms however there are a range of topics this module requires you to investigate, and you are expected to seek out and read your own material, as well as that which individual tutors suggest. However as a starting point you should at some point touch on each of the following (handouts from books will be given in studio):

Key Texts:

- Laurel, B. 1993. Computers as Theatre. Reading MA: Addison Wesley
- McKee, R. 1999. Story. London: Methuen

Suggested Reading:

- Aristotle. 1993. The Poetics. London: Penguin Classics
- McLoud, S. Reading Comics. (Chapter 6, 'Show and Tell') New York: HarperPerennial

Interactive Entertainment:

- Steadman, C. 1994. 2 solitudes: http://www.intertext.com/magazine/v5n1/solitudes.html One of the earliest examples of email narrative.
- Bevan, R and Wright, T. 2000. Online Caroline: http://www.onlinecaroline.com BAFTA award winning online narrative.
- Betcherman, M and Diamond, D: The Daughters of Freya: http://emailmystery.com/dof/index.php Email mystery -you have to pay to get the whole thing but you can get three free episodes

General Information

Effort Required From You

This is a **30 credit module**, the total time allocated to this module is 300 hours:

- c. 60 hours of supervised teaching time (studios, lectures, seminars, presentations and supervision meetings, etc)
- 240 hours of self-directed study

Appendix D
The Re-Telling Case Study Ethics Forms

THE following documents were used in *The Re-Telling* case study as documented in Part III of this thesis. Students were given copies of both the Information sheet and the Procedure form before being asked to complete the Informed Consent form.

These documents were submitted to the School of Computing ethics committee at the University of Dundee and duly approved before the project started.

Information about the Storytelling & New Media Study

The Storytelling & New Media study forms part of the IMD module 32001 'The Re-telling'. The study aims to explore the essential qualities of traditional storytelling and explore what storytelling can add to digital culture.

This study will follow the progress of third year Interactive Media Design (IMD) students as they work on a 12 week individual project 'The Re-telling' to interpret a traditional Scottish traveller tale in digital media.

You will be asked to take part in several workshops designed to introduce you to telling traditional stories both in traditional and digital ways. You will be encouraged to explore new media and storytelling in your own individual project research and through organised workshops such as computer gaming.

The project you will be working on is to interpret a traditional Scottish story using digital means, and by incorporating elements of both live performance and digital media. The digital story will be performed or told in a live festival setting at the end of the project.

The study data will be captured using a variety of media, including written notes by the researcher and participants, video & audio recording, still photographs and participant blogs. This mix of documenting will help with reflection and analysis afterwards.

Please note that you will be helping the researchers to understand the relationship between traditional storytelling and new media. You are not being tested for this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can leave the study at any time without penalty or giving reasons.

Data collected from this study will be used in my PhD thesis.

Participants will be asked to sign a form saying that they are willing to participate in the study. The consent form will explain what will be recorded and what will happen to any information which is collected. The participants will be given a copy of this form to keep. Participant anonymity will be ensured throughout the study with name identity obscured and names changed if any content is published.

If you would like to know more about this research and/or you have questions, please feel free to contact me, Debbie Maxwell, Interactive Design Lab, University of Dundee, Dundee DD1 4HN. I can be contacted by phone at 07884018724 or by email at d.maxwell@dundee.ac.uk.

Procedure form for the Storytelling & New Media Study

The Storytelling & New Media study forms part of my PhD research in the School of Design and School of Computing at the University of Dundee. This study aims to verify the essential qualities of traditional storytelling, consider how these qualities can be transposed digitally, and explore what storytelling can add to digital culture.

This study will follow the progress of third year Interactive Media Design (IMD) students as they work on a 12 week individual project 'The Re-telling' to reinterpret a traditional Scottish traveller tale in digital media. The study will be supported by a series of workshops intended to introduce students to traditional storytelling and current digital storytelling techniques.

Data collected from this study will be used to support my PhD thesis.

Recruitment: Participants will be sought from level 3 IMD students on the Interactive Entertainment module (IMD32001).

Procedure: Participants will be asked to take part in several workshops to tell traditional stories both traditionally and digitally. They will be encouraged to explore new media and storytelling in their own project research and through organised workshops such as computer gaming.

They will be asked to interpret a traditional Scottish story using digital means, with elements of both live performance and digital media. They will perform this project in a live festival setting (which will also form part of their module submission).

The study data will be captured using a variety of media, including written notes by the researcher and participants, video & audio recording, still photographs and participant blogs. This mix of captured data will aid triangulation and so aid reflection and analysis.

Name identity will be obscured and names changed if content is disseminated.

Informed Consent: Each participant will be given an Informed Consent Form to sign.

The study will only be conducted if signed consent has been obtained. The consent forms to be used are attached.

Contact Information: At the beginning/end of the interview, the participant will be offered information that describes the purpose of the study in general terms. If there are further questions beyond this, the participant is encouraged to contact the principal investigator, Debbie Maxwell, Interactive Design Lab, University of Dundee, Dundee DD1 4HN. I can be contacted by phone at 07884018724 or by email at: d.maxwell@.dundee.ac.uk.

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant

Thank you for your interest in this study on storytelling and new media. This page describes what you will be asked to do for the study. Please read through it and then sign at the bottom to say that you understand and accept the conditions of this study. If you have questions, please feel free to ask the researcher.

The researcher will observe your discussions and projects as you attend workshops and studio sessions in the 32001 module, 'The Re-telling'. You will at times be documented by videotape and still photographs as this will allow the researcher to accurately review and reflect on the information afterwards. The researcher will also make written notes to document discussions and may refer to information written by you during studio sessions and on the InterAct blog as it relates to the module.

Please note that you are helping the researchers to understand the relationship between traditional storytelling and new media. You are not being tested for the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can leave the study at any time without penalty or giving reasons. No undue risk arises from the participation in this study. All the information which you give us and the videotapes (that is all data) will be stored safely and kept separate from information about your identity. Access to your data is minimised to the people involved in this research. If information about you is used for publications or presentation, we will ensure that no reference to your identity is made. If a photograph or video-clip is used for presentation, your name identity will be obscured and your name changed.

Please date and sign this page below to indicate that you understand and accept the conditions of this study.

Thank you.

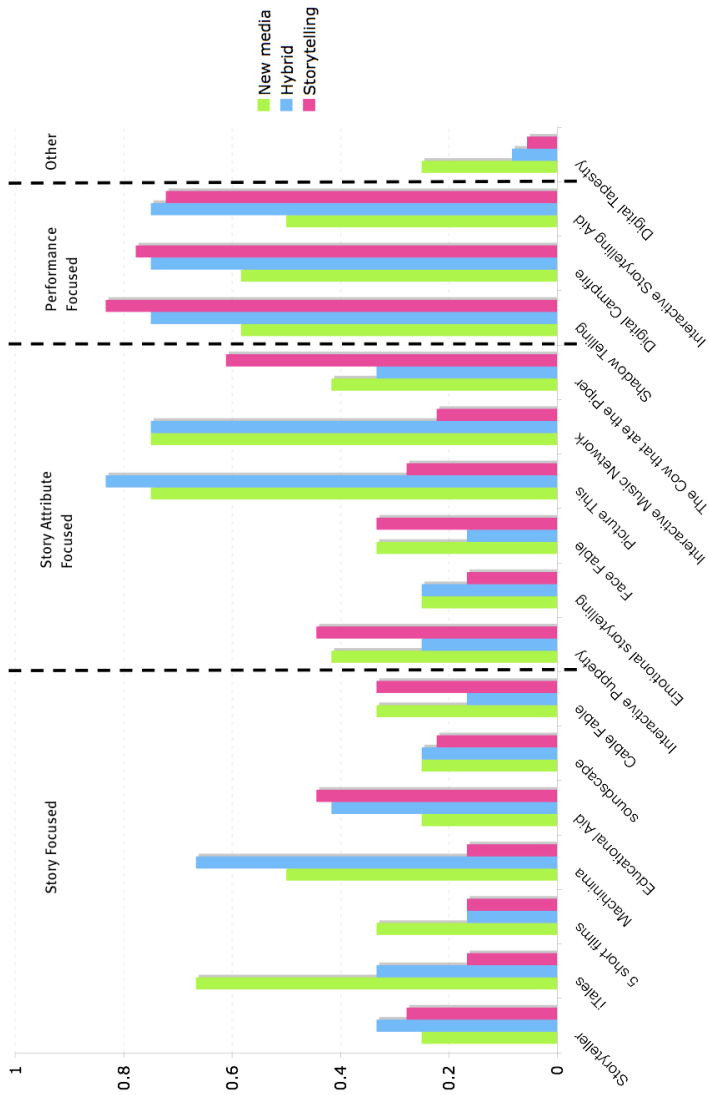
Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Witness of Researcher: _____

Date: ___ /_____ / 200 _

Appendix E
The Re-Telling Results: Graph & Tables



Graph E1. New media, hybrid and storytelling qualities present in Lens for Reflection for each ReTelling project.

Projects	Digitality	Dispersal	Multimodality	Ephemerality	Total	Normalised
Storyteller	1	0	2	0	3	0.25
iTales	3	2	1	2	8	0.67
5 short films	2	1	1	0	4	0.33
Machinima	3	2	1	0	6	0.50
Educational Aid	1	1	1	0	3	0.25
soundscape	3	0	0	0	3	0.25
Cable Fable	1	1	1	1	4	0.33
Interactive Puppetry	2	1	2	0	5	0.42
Emotional storytelling	2	0	1	0	3	0.25
Face Fable	2	0	2	0	4	0.33
Picture This	2	3	2	2	9	0.75
Interactive Music Network	3	3	1	2	9	0.75
The Cow that ate the Piper	2	2	1	0	5	0.42
Shadow Telling	2	0	2	3	7	0.58
Digital Campfire	2	0	2	3	7	0.58
Interactive Storytelling Aid	2	0	2	2	6	0.50
Digital Tapestry	3	0	0	0	3	0.25

Table E1. New Media qualities present in Lens for Reflection for each ReTelling project, with totals and normalised totals.

Projects	Transportation	Malleability	Co-creation	Social	Total	Normalised
Storyteller	1	1	1	1	4	0.33
iTales	2	1	1	0	4	0.33
5 short films	2	0	0	0	2	0.17
Machinima	2	2	2	2	8	0.67
Educational Aid	1	1	1	2	5	0.42
soundscape	3	0	0	0	3	0.25
Cable Fable	1	0	0	1	2	0.17
Interactive Puppetry	1	1	1	0	3	0.25
Emotional storytelling	3	0	0	0	3	0.25
Face Fable	2	0	0	0	2	0.17
Picture This	3	2	3	2	10	0.83
Interactive Music Network	1	3	3	2	9	0.75
The Cow that ate the Piper	1	0	0	3	4	0.33
Shadow Telling	3	2	2	2	9	0.75
Digital Campfire	3	2	2	2	9	0.75
Interactive Storytelling Aid	2	2	2	3	9	0.75
Digital Tapestry	1	0	0	0	1	0.083

Table E2. Common new media and storytelling qualities in Lens for Reflection present in each ReTelling project, with totals and normalised totals.

Projects	Coll. memory	Performance	Liveness	Presence	Voice	Gesture	Total	Normalised
Storyteller	0	2	1	1	1	0	5	0.28
iTales	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	0.17
5 short films	0	1	0	0	2	0	3	0.17
Machinima	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	0.17
Educational Aid	0	2	2	2	2	0	8	0.44
soundscape	0	1	0	0	3	0	4	0.22
Cable Fable	1	1	1	1	2	0	6	0.33
Interactive Puppetry	1	0	2	2	2	1	8	0.44
Emotional storytelling	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	0.17
Face Fable	0	1	0	3	2	0	6	0.33
Picture This	2	1	0	0	2	0	5	0.28
Interactive Music Network	0	1	0	0	3	0	4	0.22
The Cow that ate the Piper	3	2	2	3	1	0	11	0.61
Shadow Telling	2	3	3	2	2	3	15	0.83
Digital Campfire	2	3	3	2	2	2	14	0.78
Interactive Storytelling Aid	1	3	3	2	2	2	13	0.72
Digital Tapestry	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.06

Table E3. Storytelling qualities in Lens for Reflection present in each ReTelling project, with totals and normalised totals.